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BEM

EXCLUSIVE:
2000 AD DROIDS INTERVIEWED

NEWS AT BEM

Bem-29 August 1980

editor & publisher: Martin Lock
consulting editor: Mike Cruden

As mentioned last time, Bem now has a cover price of 50 pence -- and more reading than ever before, as we've managed to keep the number of pages of advertisements down a bit (around 2 pages less than last time if my adding-up's correct). As Bem isn't an adzine, we'll try not to get swamped with ads; our ad rates are going up, reflecting the growing circulation and also a feeling that they should pay for at least a bit more than the cost of printing that page. And, as a final word on price increases, the Bem subscription rate is going up on September 1st, from £3 for seven issues to £3 for six issues -- so now's a good time to make an investment in Bem's future!

This is our special 2000AD issue, with a couple of interviews with the people behind fandom's favourite weekly, a few other special items, and as special guest artist, Mike McMahon, who is currently drawing some excellent Judge Dredd strips for 2000AD. He drew our cover this time (in fact, he drew it twice, as our friendly Royal Mail lost the first version), plus the interior illustrations for the main interview with Steve McManus, 2000AD's editor, and Alan Grant. Aspiring artists may be interested to know that all Mike's art in this issue is being reproduced at exactly the size he drew it, including the cover; Mike, thank you for some excellent work.

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Fitting in an 8-page interview on top of the regular Bem departments was only made possible by leaving out H.M.S. Conqueror this time; if all goes well, though, Fl'ff, Frank, and the others will be back next time. Dave Harwood is working on both a 5-page complete short strip, introducing a new regular character, and also a 3-part adventure--the illustration to my right is Dave's original concept drawing for what became the 3-parter, to whet your appetite!

With some reluctance, I announce the end of an era. Mike Cruden began to answer the letters to Reaction in Bem-17; his last issue doing this, at least for the time being, will be Bem-30. The reason for this is simple -- Mike & Sue are expecting a baby in the autumn, so they'll both be far too busy with nappies, midnight feeds and things a bachelor like me has never heard of! I'm certain I speak for us all in wishing both Sue and Mike lots of happiness in their new career; is it right that the first 16 years are the worst? -Martin

THE BEM BALLOT "FAN ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS" FOR 1979 -- RESULTS IN FULL

1. Favourite new fanzine (not more than four issues published by the end of 1979)

OGRE	42.7%
Working Klass Superhero	17.3%
Masters Of Infinity	13.3%
Argent Void Press	9.3%
After Image	8.0%

2. Favourite fan artist

HUNT EMERSON	28.0%
Dave Harwood	20.0%
Dave Hornsby	14.7%
(Bob Watkins	9.3%
(Avram Buchanan	
(Russ Nicholson	4.0%
(Colin Wilson	

3. Favourite fan writer

KATHLEEN GLANCY	21.3%
Mike Cruden	18.7%
K. Williams	17.3%
(Nige Edwards	13.3%
(Cat Yronwode	
Maureen James	8.0%

4. Favourite fanzine cover of 1979

BEM-23 (BRIAN BOLLAND)	56.0%
Bem-25 (Bryan Talbot)	18.7%
Comics Unlimited 50 (Paul Jay)	13.3%
Bem-26 (Russ Nicholson)	6.7%

5. Favourite fanzine strip of 1979

H.M.S. CONQUEROR	30.7%
by Dave Harwood & Martin Lock	
Thundermole	29.3%
by Terry M. Moore	
Nasty Comix	16.0%
by Mark Casto	
The Successors	14.7%
by Keith J. Luck & Dave Edge	

6. "Hall of Fame" Award for past contribution to fandom

ALAN AUSTIN	44.0%
Richard Burton	30.7%
Dez Skinn	16.0%

75 people voted for this series of fan awards -- a slightly lower number than voted in the first, nominating round, due to the absence of second-stage Eagle Award forms to send them back with. However, the numbers involved are large enough to give a fair idea of what Bem's readership thinks. Looking at the results (and congratulations to everyone who reached the "finals"), it's interesting to see how close some of the results were, much closer than the first-round figures had led me to expect.

This has been a sort of "dry run" -- and a successful one, I feel. Next year's award ballots will be circulated more widely, to make them more representative of fandom in this country as a whole; thanks to the last part of the voting form, the categories of "regular column", "fanzine article", and "fanzine (all-time)" will be added. Each of these categories got the approval of at least 73.3% of the voters, while the other pair of categories suggested, "fan personality" and "professional contributing to fanzines", got less than 50% each.

So, start thinking about 1980's favourite fan achievements; the only problem is, what should we call the things? "Sparrow Awards" (like Eagles, but smaller) and "Ego Awards" are cute, "Bemmies" or "Emlocks" are rather too Bem-orientated, "British Fandom Awards" or "Fan Achievement Awards" rather formal, not to mention what they'd get abbreviated to..."Oscars" are already taken, "Herrimans" is too worthy a name for a minor enterprise like this...somewhere there's got to be the right name, if we think hard enough. If you have any more good ideas, let us know! -ML

news

The recent dispute at IPC between the management and the members of the National Union of Journalists halted printing of all IPC's comics; 2000AD's last issue before suspension was prog 164, dated 10 May; prog 165 was dated 14 June, and, a fortnight later with prog 166, double-dated 21-28 June, the regular weekly publication schedule was resumed.

This hiatus has led to some changes in scheduling; the next boom issue will now be prog 178, cover-dated 20th September. The free gift metal Judge Dredd badge will be enclosed, and a number of special T-shirts featuring the Judge will be given away. Judge Dredd's "Judge Child" saga, which at present seems set to run on for years, continues on through; Strontium Dog returns, by Alan Grant & Ezquerra, and the future-sport "Mean Arena" begins, by Tom "Harlem Heroes" Tully and Cam Kennedy --"The Meltdown Man" is the Belardinelli-drawn series, and "Dash Decent" ventures to the Planet Pongo, from the duo who did the earliest "Captain Klep" adventures in Tornado, Dave Angus and Kevin O'Neill.

THARG THE RUDE BOY? SEEING IS BELIEVING-INSIDE!
26 JULY 80
PROG 170
IN ORBIT EVERY MONDAY
AND TORNADO
12p
IT IS USELESS TO RESIST, LITTLE MAN - YOU HAVE BEEN JUDGED DEAD!
DREDD MEETS-
THE NECROMANCER!

Progs 169 & 171 have wrap-around covers. Mike McMahon has drawn the first one, for "The Judges' Civil War", while the latter one features Slippery Jim DiGriz (a.k.a. the Stainless Steel Rat), by Ezquerra.

A Judge Dredd 2-parter, "The Jigsaw Man", by Brian Bolland is scheduled for progs 172 and 173, complete with covers by Brian, and a Dredd pin-up back cover by Mike McMahon for prog 172.

On the bank holiday week-end of Sunday 24th and Monday 25th August, IPC is to stage an "IPC Comics Weekend" at the Penta Hotel in London; for £24, one parent plus one earthlet can go along for various comics events, meeting lots of IPC writers and artists. 2000AD is one of the comics participating; Steve McManus will be on hand, and, probably, Brian Bolland. For details, consult prog 171.

As mentioned last time, the summer 2000 AD Sci-Fi Special will be out in August, with a front cover by Mike McMahon, and a back cover by Robin Smith featuring Tharg the Mighty. Steve Dillon and Dave Harwood strips are among the delights inside.

Marvel Britain will be launching a new 12p, 32-page weekly in the autumn, under the title SPIDER-MAN AND THE SUPER-HEROES --it will feature Spider-Man team-ups from MArvel Team-Up, plus Ms Marvel, the Fantastic Four, Morbius, What If, and a showcase feature. The well-known web-slinger will continue to appear in the SPIDER-MAN AND HULK WEEKLY as well.

On the other hand, ol' Greenskin loses his second book: RAMPAGE will now cover-feature the X-Men, backed up by Power Man (who has already ousted Dr Strange) and Thing team-ups. Marvel Britain have quite a few other launches planned, but nothing they wish to announce yet!

Dez Skinn's six monthly Marvel comics continue unchanged, except that, with #6, SPIDER-MAN POCKET BOOK will switch from recent Spider-Man team-ups (now required for the new weekly) to the early Lee and Ditko stories, beginning with issue 1.

Dez has now set up a new company called "Studio System", which absorbs Starburst Magazines Ltd and Pioneer Press. In collaboration with Graham Marsh, who was art director of COMPANY magazine, Dez is now running a design studio, situated in Dean Street in luxurious ground floor offices. Plans are in motion for collaborations with Europe and America; besides comics, Studio System will provide typography, design, and layout services. An animator will also be employed.

Most of the work done by Studio Systems will not be seen by the general public. A lot of work is being done for the film industry (including "All That Jazz", a somewhat surrealistic film about death, "Super Snooper", an Italy-USA comedy co production starring Terrence "Trinity" Hill as a super-powered hero with a weakness for red, and the new revised CE3K); in fact, Dez's first major project after he finally decided not to renew his contract with Marvel was an adaptation of a movie not yet filmed into comics form. Only a thousand copies of "The Monster Club" have been printed, on slick paper with a painted colour cover by John Bolton --so the cost per copy was over £4! John Bolton did 21 pages of the strip, which was adapted and scripted by Dez, and David Lloyd came in to do a 4-page story within the story. The completed comic is being used by Milton Subotsky and his associates to promote the film with distributors--and also as "storyboards" for the film, and even for make-up ideas. Dez's company retains the copyright to the adaptation, so it could appear elsewhere later.

Studio System are also involved in producing a 40-page full-colour, 500,000 print-run one-off comic magazine, due out in October. It's on glossy paper, with painted colours like the old EAGLE, and includes "a superhero & everything", says Dez enigmatically. It won't be on sale in newsagents--more than that he's not giving away at present.

Regarding HOUSE OF HAMMER, Dez Skinn says they aren't doing any independent publishing at present; they would gladly package it for another publisher, though!

Recent rumours that METAL HURLANT has folded are not true. The opposite in fact --having just celebrated their 50th birthday with a bumper retrospective issue, they have now launched the new-look zine with 100 pages of full colour each month. To top this, the magazine will be going fortnightly in France in September.

The book division of Les Humanoides Associes has not fared so well, however. The production schedule has been reduced from 8 to 5 books per month. This is the area where the recent rumours probably originate--and it is true that there are some financial difficulties. It appears that these are not too serious, although all items are now published by a new company called The New Humanoides.

The old company remains chairman of the new one. The only major change in their situation seems to be the ending of their contract with America's HEAVY METAL. It seems the relationship between the two editions has never been comfortable, and the new re-shuffling allows France to end the arrangement. A spokesman said that they hope to find another USA licensee someday--probably one with a more underground or grassroots orientation.

The foreign rights to METAL HURLANT are well secured anyway, with associated editions in Germany, Holland, Portugal, Italy, Spain and others. The Humanoides are even hoping to get the METAL name back from the American publishers. There is some doubt as to whether this is actually possible at this advanced stage.

AIEE and ERE COMPRIMEE are the latest two new French comic magazines. The first is a humour item like FLUIDE GLACIAL; a few more serious strips with very fine, artwork are thrown in for good measure. The second title is the French edition of 1994 magazine, although the inside content is more varied. Some Wally Wood and Ralph Reese work doesn't originate from Warren either. A 16-page colour section is given over to Richard Corben each issue--at the moment it's the "Mutant World" story.

Another new magazine is NEUTRON. This contains a selection of sf comic serials which appear to be previously unpublished. They range from mediocre to very good, with some interesting new artists. The first issue is the only one seen to date.

The new-format CIRCUS magazine is going overboard with colour work by British veteran Don Lawrence. Most of it comes from IPC, but the reproduction is far better than that company would ever give.

There are two issues so far of VITAMINE. It could best be described as a fanzine turned big-time; it has newsstand distribution, and may improve with time.

(French news supplied by Mal Burns)

THE BEM INTERVIEW

2000 A.D.

After interviewing Dez Skinn for Bem-27, Adam Pirani returns with another lengthy lead interview for us. He took his tape recorder to Tharg's spaceship, known to unsuspecting Earthlets as King's Reach Tower, a couple of months ago, and, with the permission of course of The Mighty One, interrogated 2000AD's editor, Steve McManus, and his assistant editor, Alan Grant, better known as "AALN-1". Since Adam's visit, Alan has in fact been lured away from IPC, so we are lucky to have his views as a long-time member of the 2000AD team. And now, read on:

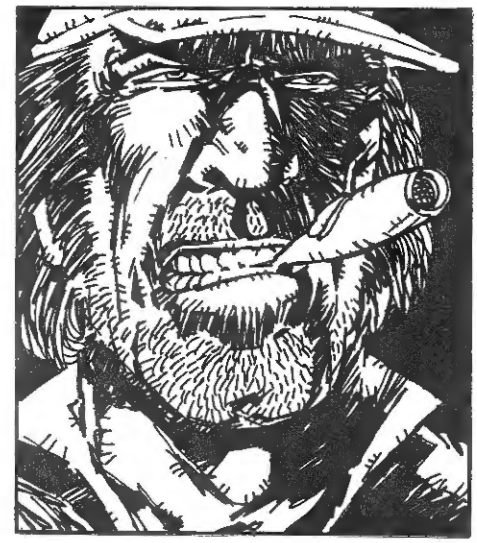
AP: How did you come to be working on 2000 AD, had you worked on other comics before?
SM: I joined IPC six years ago and worked on Valiant as sub-editor for about a year, then I worked on the first issues of Battle, which was great. It was so different from Valiant, it was the first of the new wave of comics that came out under the direction of Pat Mills and John Wagner. I was on Battle for about two years, and then Kelvin Gosnell, who was editor of 2000 at the time, asked me if I wanted to be chief sub on Starlord, the new one he was producing, and I said yeah, mainly because it meant I would earn quite a bit more money. It also meant I would be promoted and have more control. So I worked on that for a while, and when that went I came and worked on 2000, as chief sub. I took Nick Landau's job in fact.
AP: He left?
SM: He didn't leave actually, there was a bit of skull-duggery, which was nothing to do with me. He was double-crossed. I think you ought to ask him about that, not me.
AP: How did you become editor?
SM: I became editor when Kelvin resigned as editor.
AP: It all sounds a bit underhand.
AG: He'd had enough of 2000AD, he wasn't being able to do what he wanted, he wasn't getting on with the people above him, and he decided to resign.
AP: Is there some lack of creative freedom?
AG: Well what do you think? You read 2000 every week -- do <u>you</u> think there's a lack of creative freedom in it? I would say no.
SM: Maybe at the time.
AG: There's a lack of IPC wanting to invest money in anything which isn't going to bring them an immediate and large profit, but that's not got anything to do with a lack of creative freedom.
AP: What was your first impression when you came here--you know, "2000 AD!" What did you think?
SM: Working here at IPC, you know the other comics, you know everyone, and you know how the comics are run, so it wasn't strange to me. A bit anarchistic, but that was the whole kind of thing behind it when it started, a melting pot of ideas, and people weren't really worried about their position.
AP: Is that different from other comics?
SM: Well a normal IPC comic is four people; the editor, the sub editor, the art editor and the artbod, which was how it was on Valiant. And on Valiant, the art guy wasn't really expected to come up with ideas, nor was the sub for that matter, he did but they very rarely accepted them, because they had worked for twenty years to get to their position, and they didn't see why a sub should become number one. Whereas on 2000, it was just four people chucking in ideas, a whole lot of people in fact.
AP: Can you explain a little about what goes on between you and "above". What's the hierachy, how does that work?
SM: Well I am the editor, and above me is the group editor, who's responsible for the boys' group, that's Tiger, Roy of the

Rovers and Battle, and the new one Speed. You get the same thing on the girls' side. One group editor with four editors underneath him. Above the group editor is a managing editor who is in charge of both the girls and the boys, and above him, well there's publishers, and...it gets a bit complicated, wouldn't you say, Alan?
AG: It gets very complicated. There's no direct, easy to work out hierachy. Some people tend to have jobs purely because they've been in IPC for a long time, and although the job's got a title it doesn't really mean that they have to do all that much.

AG: Nothing's going to change. I mean, it's not a fault that can be levelled at IPC on its own. Any company which gets as big as this company has to go on for larger and larger and larger profits, because it becomes more and more uneconomical for them to go for putting out limited circulation stuff with small profits. The larger they get the more likely they'll become like dinosaurs and just die out. I can see the same sort of thing happening to IPC unless it's split into different divisions, which are run independently. In other words, if they turned IPC into a number of small independent companies within the one parent company I think it would be alright--but I can't really see them doing that. I don't think so. At the moment it doesn't make economic sense. They make a lot of money with the set-up that they've got, so why should they change it?
AP: What sort of position do you see 2000 AD occupying in the world of comics? To a lot of people who read Bem it's something special, something different from other weekly comics. I mean something different.
AG: Yeah, to us it's special as well, to us it's different as well. That's why it is different, because nobody treats it as just being a job, or as just being another comic. Everybody's in love with the things that they do. Everybody enjoys it, everybody has fun doing it. That's why 2000AD is a good comic.
AP: Was it the same with Starlord?
AG: Well err... I didn't actually work for IPC when Starlord was being published, but I know the people who worked on Starlord and I think they had the same sort of feelings. They thought they were doing something really fresh, new, exciting, something that had never been done before. They got excited about it, they put everything into what they were doing, and to be blunt about it, I think that they were screwed up by the management. Starlord was originally meant to be a monthly science fiction magazine, and the decision to make it a weekly wasn't taken until the last moment, which perhaps explains why the standard of the stuff in Starlord dropped. I think it dropped, anyway. It started off at quite a high peak, and they weren't able to maintain it. They would have been able to if it had been as originally intended and gone monthly, but it meant everybody had to do everything four times as quickly to get it out weekly.
AP: What sort of monthly would it have been?
AG: It would have been more or less the same as it was, except it would have been monthly.
SM: It would have been monthly with two ten page stories -- one Strontium Dog and one Ro-Busters, plus a short story of say six, which would have made it twenty six, and I think the rest would have been feature. And when they decided to change it to a weekly, a week before it was due to press, the editor had to come up with two new stories in a week...three new stories. And that's not the way you do a comic. If you're doing a comic, you've got to spend a long time getting the stories right. So when it came out it had two good stories and three weak ones, and that's why it failed.
AP: Did you ever get any explanation why it was changed from monthly to weekly?
SM: I think the board got scared. It was quite a new thing for them to do a boys' monthly, and at the last moment they got cold feet and said "Let's be safe, make it a boys' weekly".
AP: And you think that's why it failed?
SM: Yeah, it was rushed.
AP: Can we get back to what sort of position you think 2000AD occupies in the world of comics?
AG: Yeah, we think it's the chief comic, we think it's the best comic.
AP: So if you worked on anything else, would you not be as satisfied?
AG: If I worked on anything else I'd put as much effort into making it the best as we all put into making 2000 the best. I mean, that's why it's the best -- because everybody works bloody hard to make it the best! If a script's not right, it's not accepted, it's redone. If it's still not right, if the author can't get it right it's redone in the office. Even when jobs are done in a hurry we try to do them as well as we can. I mean, obviously we can't always succeed, sometimes we end up with a duff story, which we've just got to run until it finishes. Because you don't really have any choice, when you've budgeted for four or five pages a week for twelve weeks. If the story doesn't take off, if the artwork's not good for it, you just can't come up with something new at the snap of a finger. It's all got to be thought out first and arranged with the writer and the artist. But I think that it's safe to say that we all firmly believe that 2000AD is the best comic--that doesn't mean to say that we're putting down other comics, they've all got their own particular market, but we think that in our share of Earthlet readership we are the best thing that they can spend their twelve pence on every week.
AP: Can you tell me a little about the audience, about how it's made up?
AG: The readership of 2000? Well, last year we ran a reader's survey which attracted about twelve hundred replies eventually. Obviously we can't extend the results of twelve hundred completed forms to cover the 130,000 who buy--
AP: That's the circulation?
AG: Yes, in this country at the moment, it's 130,000. Well, it's fluctuated between about 120,000 and 200,000 in the last year since I started here. 200,000 is what it was up to after we merged with Tornado. Anyway, the reader's survey. Twelve hundred replies, which were split almost exactly down the middle. There were as many replies from kids under the age of fourteen as there were from kids aged fourteen and over -- or from people aged fourteen and over. And I think that's the way we see it. We don't see 2000 as being aimed at twelve year olds or ten year olds or fourteen or fifteen year olds --we like to think that anybody from a six year old right up can enjoy it. We've had letters from old age pensioners, from forty year olds, from doctors, authors, fans -- I mean, you name it, we've had letters from them, praising us for 2000 AD. We all like to think that anybody who picks it up and reads it can get a kick out of it. Unless their thrill circuits are malfunctioning!
AP: How about the armed forces, do you have an explanation for that?
AG: No, we've never really thought about it. In the same way that in the past six months or so we've been getting more and more letters from female readers--
AP: Is it mostly boys anyway?
AG: It was supposed to be a boys' comic--I mean, it's part of a boys' comic group. This is the boys' adventure group. I can't imagine Battle getting any letters from girls, I can't imagine Roy of the Rovers or Tiger getting the same sort of letters from girls that we do.
AP: They're all in love with Tharg?
AG: In the same way we've been getting an increasing number of letters from members of the armed forces. We're corresponding at the moment with a couple of guys from the Navy who're putting out their own fanzine--they're doing a couple of issues on things centred around 2000, interviews with Tharg etcetera. When we ran the alien design competition we had entries from Navy ships, we had entries from army bases --I don't know why, I suppose they must be bored! 2000AD is good--of course they would buy it and read it rather than Men Only, or Warlord and the Crunch. It's better, that's why they buy it, that's why they read it.
AP: Judge Dredd is of course not just popular with the general readership, he's popular with comic fans here and in the United States. How do you analyse the appeal of the character?
AG: Judge Dredd?
AP: I would say he's a fascist.
AG: That's his main appeal, I think, the fact that he's a fascist, that Dredd is the ultimate cop. His emotions, if he in fact does have any emotions, have got absolutely nothing to do with the stories. He has a job to do and his emotions are not allowed to interfere with it. He is there to enforce the law and he has to do it.
AP: It's like an ultimate decision-making character.
AG: Yes, right, it's just got to be done. If somebody's got to be shot for dropping litter, then that's what he's got to do.
SM: And most Judges' emotions are burned out during their fifteen years' training, till they are almost machines -- that was the original concept, it's weakened now--
AP: Is there a lot of Dredd mythology that we don't see?
SM: Most of the background to it will be told in the Judge Dredd annual, which is not being done as a usual IPC annual. We've got a big budget for it, and there's no reprint in it apart from a couple of pages about the Judge himself. It's all about Judge Dredd, anything you want to know, just about, will be in there.
AG: I think we should add that it's not only the character that has made Dredd popular, it's the quality of the scripts and the artwork as well.
AP: Would there ever be the possibility of giving Judge Dredd his own comic? Has

that ever happened before, in fact?
AG: Yes, it has happened before. Roy of the Rovers was originally a character in Tiger, and he was so popular that he was taken out and given his own comic. I could see the same thing happening with Judge Dredd, but there's quite a big drawback to it in that there are very few people who can write scripts to the standard that a Judge Dredd story requires. And to remove Judge Dredd from 2000AD I think would be to seriously weaken the appeal of 2000. You might be able to make a Judge Dredd comic into a big success, but I don't think that you could have both 2000

and the Judge Dredd comic doing equally well. One of them would have to do better than the other.
SM: A lot of the ideas we have were mooted ages ago. They proposed to the board or the management a Judge Dredd comic, a Judge Dredd fan club, a Judge Dredd everything. And at that time, which was about three years ago, they just got a bucket of cold water thrown over them. But there is a guy up here now, one of our big bosses, who's wild about Judge Dredd. He wants to do a Judge Dredd comic, and he wants to do this, that and the other. But as Alan says, there is only one John Wagner. When you can clone John Wagner, when you can clone Brian Bolland, you can do it. There's Pat Mills as well, those are the two guys who could possibly do it, but that's it.
AP: Is it true that IPC's general strategy is to launch new weeklies, create a new readership, and then combine two titles to increase the number of readers for the new joint comic? This happened with Starlord and Tornado -- are we going to have "2000AD and Speed" next?
AG: No, no. It has appeared as if this has been IPC policy, and we suspect that it might be deliberate policy--but everything that the people above us have ever told us points to the fact that it's not deliberate, that comics are launched, if they succeed, that's it, they keep them running. If they don't succeed they've got to do something with them, and the only thing to do is to take the readership which these new comics have and merge it with an existing comic. In a way it's become standard practise in British publishing; DC Thomson haven't been big on a merge policy up until relatively recently, but now they have started bringing out comics which it's obvious are going to be merged within six months. Crunch might not have been brought out as merge material but it wasn't long before it became it--and before they realised it and started to tailor the stories so that they could end them and merge into Hotspur. DC Thomson generally follow behind IPC, so if IPC set a new lead by coming out with a policy which doesn't include merging, DC Thomson will probably follow that as well in another year or two's time. The thing is, in my opinion, the future of publishing in this country is such that companies like IPC will have to stop concentrating on mass market publications, and they'll have to go for smaller, almost guaranteed circulation magazines or publications. Like, you'll decide that there's a readership of a hundred thousand, say, for a weekly science fiction comic costing 15 pence, and you work on that one hundred thousand and you assume that you're going to have them every week. The way that it works just now, a hundred thousand is too low a circulation for a comic to have; the company start to get worried once the circulation's down to a hundred thousand. They try to think of ways of boosting that circulation, putting it back up again. I think if they just accepted the fact that every comic probably has a hard core following, and if they reduce what they expect in the way of profits and go for these smaller circulation things, I think that that would make a lot more sense. I also think that whether IPC want to do it or not, they're going to be forced to do it in the years to come, because computer journalism is going to force it. You can buy a home computer terminal for about a grand -- once it comes down to about four or five hundred quid, how many fanzines are there going to be who can raise that sort of money and sit and produce their own magazines, sell them at thirty or forty pence? Fanzines at the moment, generally speaking, are a pretty duff lot, but once the technology's there, they'll soon improve.
SM: To answer that merge question, I think a good way of answering it is to look back over the past twenty years of comics, say back to 1960. Most comics up here then were doing 350,000 copies a week. The way they ran comics then was they would launch one, it would be about 350,000, and it would gradually drop down to a break-even of say 200,000, and then they would just give it a free gift, and it would shoot up to 350,000 again, and drop down. And they did this with each comic once a year. It was easy, you bunged it on TV, the kids ran out and bought it, and once they'd bought it they stuck with the comic. But round about '68, say the end of the sixties, they found that no matter how much they boomed it, what would happen was the kids would run out, buy the free gift, and then stop buying the comic. And the boys' market was in a terrible state, so was the girls' market. And so they figured that it must be the editorial content, and that's why you had Battle, then Action, then 2000, which were produced by these two new guys Pat Mills and John Wagner. The old regime was out, the new was in.
AP: Why do you think it was?
AG: There was a new generation of kids growing up and what they needed was a new generation of editorial staff who were in touch with what these kids wanted.
SM: Now, each of those new launches, they would have been happy with a regular 200,000 circulation. Their expectations had come down. But none of those even made 200,000; and now they're happy with about 170,000. That's how their merge policy was born. Free gifts didn't work, schemes didn't work too well, so all they do now is launch one, and then merge it. And that's the way they make their money.
AP: Do you supervise all the strips in 2000, every single one?
AG: Between the two of us we supervise all of them.
AP: How far does your editorial control go?
SM: Well it depends who it is. For instance, I would hesitate to phone John Wagner up and say, "I want--"
AP: "I want to cut half your script."
SM: Yeah.
AG: One of the things about John Wagner's involvement with 2000 is that his scripts aren't usually presented to us as a fait accompli; I mean, we're all pretty friendly with each other, and we meet socially, and script ideas are talked over then. John does that quite a lot, he uses meeting people as a sort of testing ground for his ideas, and if it sparks off okay



he goes ahead and writes the script. It's the same sort of thing with Pat really. They're both professional enough to be left on their own, they won't make mistakes that other authors will make, you know that you'll never get a duff script from either of them.
SM: There are other authors who we meet and discuss, and what comes in isn't right. Then we have to put in what we want. What John and Pat present is usually so bang on the button, you're grateful, and out it goes to the artist, and the time that they've bought you you can spend on other things.
AP: Is there a great lack of writers... and artists?
AG: We are certainly approached more by people who want to become comic artists than we are by people who want to become comic writers. We're not short of artists at the moment; if any of our major artists was to leave us I don't think that at the moment we would have very much bother in replacing them. Script writers...it's a bit harder, we have fewer script writers, and we have even fewer good scriptwriters. As far as we know there's not any recognised training scheme for turning bad scriptwriters into good scriptwriters. Anybody who approaches us will get criticism and as much advice and help as we can give them, but it comes down to the fact that if you can write a script then you can do it, and if you can't you can't. Ultimately it's up to the individual who wants to do it. There's not any way that you can train somebody who's not in touch with scriptwriting to be a scriptwriter.
AP: Do you think it's possibly because there's a bigger market for creative writing than for creative drawing? If you can write scripts presumably you can write books...I don't know.
AG: I've worked in a lot of fields of journalism and I would certainly say that comics script writing to the standard that 2000AD requires is just about the hardest writing I've ever done. I guess when there's nobody to tell anybody how to write a script in the first place...I

mean, you've just got to take what you can get. As far as drawing is concerned, it's easy, somebody picks up a comic and thinks "oh hey that's a good comic, I can draw that". People want to be artists because you draw something, and there it is actually finished on the paper in front of you. Whereas if you write a script--

AP: It needs to be drawn.

AG: Yes, exactly. The script on its own is useless, nobody wants to read a script unless the artwork's with it.

AP: Do you have any long term plans, for instance for more book adaptations like the Stainless Steel Rat?

AG: We would like to do more book adaptations but it's a lot more difficult than it would seem from the Stainless Steel Rat. Harry Harrison started off his career as a comic strip illustrator and writer; when he turned to writing books he used every trick that he knew from comic writing to write the Stainless Steel Rat books -- that's why they're good books, because they're all heavily based on comic writing techniques. So it was relatively easy to turn the Stainless Steel Rat into a comic story.

AP: Was he happy with that?

AG: Yeah, he was up here, he was very happy with it, he got quite excited about it. We've had a few letters of congratulation and praise from him, and of course he's getting fairly well paid for the adaptation as well, so we've got quite a good working relationship with him. As far as other books are concerned, it's very hard to turn prose into comic strip stuff because we need an adventure content which is missing from the great majority of science fiction books.

AP: A visual sort of thing?

AG: Yeah. Although magazines like Heavy Metal for instance will print adaptations of famous science fiction books, in most cases, in my opinion, they don't work, they don't come up, because they are absolutely boring. The artwork might be tremendous, but artwork isn't there for something to look at with the story put in on top of it; artwork and the story should go hand in hand. In most adaptations they don't, and as I say it's because the books don't have the sort of adventure content that we need for a good comic strip in the first place.

AP: So do you have anything lined up?

AG: We've already got the next Stainless Steel Rat book, The Stainless Steel Rat Saves the World, but we don't have any other books. I can't speak for anybody else but I know that I read at least five science fiction novels a week and every one of them is read with a view to--"can that be turned into a story for 2000?" And so far we have come up with none. That includes things like Harry Harrison's Deathworld series, which one might have thought would have gone down the same way as the Stainless Steel Rat did, but the Stainless Steel Rat series is far superior to the Deathworld series -- pretty poor stuff, that. There's a whole bookcase full of books over there and they've all been read with a view to adapting them for 2000, and none of them are any use at all.

AP: How about films? I think House of Hammer was quite successful, and some of the Heavy Metal things -- Alien was quite good I thought.

AG: I suppose you're right, Alien wasn't bad, although it wasn't as good as it could have been, but then again it came from a duff book in the first place.

SM: I don't think we have the resources to get into that anyway.

AG: Part of the thing with adaptations is if you're going to adapt a book, fifty percent of the payment for the scriptwriter for five pages each week has to go to whoever wrote the book and created the characters originally. So Harry Harrison's getting half of that money, which leaves the scriptwriter or adapter with the other half. And nobody who's got the talent to do it is going to work for rates as low as that, it's not worth their while. Why should they spend their time and effort turning somebody else's characters and stuff into suitable material for 2000 when they could get twice the money for sitting down and thinking a wee bit harder and coming up with their own characters?

SM: I don't see why we want to adapt things anyway. I think if Robo-Hunter was a film, it would be bloody good, better than most films, or even a book, better than most of the books you've read; what is there to adapt anyway, as you say.

AP: How about extensions of the comics concept -- the Dan Dare TV series, and a toy Judge Dredd motorbike. What's going on about those? I mean, tell me about the Dan Dare TV series.

AG: We don't know anything about it really, we know that Brendan McCarthy and Brett Ewins, who work for us -- although not exclusively -- are to be employed as the art directors on the Dan Dare thing. But it was originally scheduled to come out this year; as far as we know now there is no possibility of it coming out before the summer of 1981.

AP: Will it be the old Dan Dare, or the new Dan Dare?

AG: Well we don't know, you see we've got nothing to do with it.

AP: IPC have just sold it?

AG: IPC sell rights to various things. 2000AD or the staff of 2000AD have absolutely no say over what IPC sell and they have absolutely no say over what is done with whatever IPC have sold. Although we would like to see an increasing commercial side to 2000AD characters and stories in the way that Marvel have done with all their writing paper and blow-up pillows with Spider-Man on them, I think <u>if</u> the decision was left up to us, we would insist on a higher quality than many of the firms who turn -- <u>churn</u> these things out would be willing to provide.

SM: That would be good for our circulation --but I'd like to see some of the money go to the artists and writers who created these things, and not to IPC.

AP: Would that not happen? You have no ownership?

AG: No. When IPC comics division buys anything they buy all the rights to it. They buy all the rights to the artwork, all the rights to the stories, all the rights to the characters. These pages here -- IPC own them, we are just sorting them for publication for IPC. The artwork doesn't go back to the artists--ever. If IPC sell any stories abroad, the artists don't get any royalties, any extra commission, any extra payment at all. After IPC have paid for it, everything that is made out of that is pure profit for IPC, and none of that profit goes back in any way to the people who created it. But I hasten to add that IPC is not the only company who does this -- it is also DC Comics in America policy and it is also Marvel policy. Every comics industry works on the same principle, they buy everything, and that's where they make their profit -- reselling it afterwards, using it as reprint material. Nearly all of Marvel's British comics have been filled with reprint material. Why? Because it didn't cost them anything because they own it, it costs them absolutely nothing to produce that nonsense.

AP: How about the toy Dredd motorbike?

AG: The last we heard, the factory where it was going to be produced is occupied by the workforce, because management want to close it down, and that's as much as we know about it. The Judge Dredd motorbike has been shelved as far as we know, until that particular company sort their industrial problems out.

SM: I was having second thoughts about that because I think the Dinky models are a bit crummy anyway. It was Dinky who wanted to do it, and I think Polistil do much better bikes. They do bikes at about four quid, five quid, and the detail is all there; I think that if anyone was going to do Dredd's bike they'd have to get the detail in. I don't know how many people would pay four quid for a Dredd bike, I know I would.

AG: And me. I think we all would. (Laughs) We believe in what we're doing, which could be what makes us a little bit different from many other comics.

AP: What direction would you like 2000AD to take? What direction do you think it will take?

SM: Well someone was saying to me the other day that it didn't seem to have a direction, and I thought about it, and just lately I've been thinking suddenly that our direction is that we have <u>no</u> direction, because we like to do things better. So if we see "The Fiends of the Eastern Front", a war story that can be done well, with a slight sci-fi twist, then we'll do it, and we'll grab those war readers. If we see a sports story that can be done well, i.e. in the future, we'll do it, and we'll grab Tiger's readers. So in that sense it's becoming where you find the best comic writing, whereas when it started out the direction was science adventure.

AG: I think what we would hate to see 2000 AD becoming is too specialised. I think we all realise that there is a hard core science fiction following, who would like to see the adventure content out of the comic, along with perhaps stories that don't seem to fit in with the futuristic concept. We thought that "The Fiends of the Eastern Front" was something different. And that's the thing about Tharg--he should always be presenting different thrills. One quickly becomes jaded unless one has some sort of variety. And a good story's a good story wherever it's set.

SM: And that's not a bad approach to have, because if you do that you're going to appeal to a far wider audience--if we grab five percent of Battle and Tiger then we'll really sell well.

AG: I think we would like to see 2000 being printed on glossy type paper in the same way that Doctor Who is, we would like to see say 2 pages reserved every week for adverts. We don't have two definite pages which are reserved every week for ads and we can't do it that way. I anyway

would like to see a page which you knew was the ad page, in the same way that you know that page 2 is the Nerve Centre. And we'd like to see it costing more, we'd like to see it costing twenty pence if it was printed web offset on glossy paper. But I can't really see any likelihood of that coming about at the moment, it's just got to continue more or less as it is, and we've got to continue more or less as it is, and we've got to continue doing as best we can with the material we have.

AP: In my interview with Dez Skinn in Bem #27, Dez was a bit scathing about the quality of your printing.

AG: Yeah, well we're quite scathing about the quality of our printing!

AP: I do think the quality of the paper's pretty pulpy.

AG: Yeah, but the quality of the artwork and the quality of the scripts is pretty bloody high, and if Dez Skinn thinks that it's the quality of the paper that makes a comic, that explains why everything that he's done so far has been a bloody failure.

AP: Is there any chance of going back to the printer who did progs 110 to 127?

AG: At the moment, no.

AP: what happened? Was it expensive?

AG: The figure that I heard was that it cost a thousand pounds a week more to print it web offset than it was costing to print it letterpress. Web offset is what it was between progs 110 and 127. We went onto web offset because I think our machine had to be dismantled for repair, it was time for its overhaul. They put us web offset as a sort of experiment; we knew that it was likely to last for only six months, but there was the possibility of it being extended. We were looking forward to that six months being extended, and then what happened? Tornado folded after 22 issues, we had to merge with it. It meant that IPC's printers, Southern Print, when Tornado closed, were left with a spare machine which was doing nothing, so it made sense for them to stick 2000 onto Tornado's machine, and that's how it's been since.

SM: Although Tornado was done at Gravesend I think, that's where we were originally printed, but I don't think Gravesend wanted us back, so we had to go to Southern Print, which is the same process, letterpress, but it's not as good--I think their machine's a hundred years old.

AG: Part of the bother is that for our stuff to be appreciated properly it demands high quality printing, and we make demands on letterpress printers that letterpress machines were never made to be able to carry out, and we ask for things that letterpress machines can't really do. We've had meetings with various--

SM: Dunks, taps and pongos ((Bem note: see 2000AD prog 122. --Adam))

AG: (Laughs) --with various members of the printing side of things, to try to resolve the differences between us. When we were being printed web offset, the colour spreads for example, on the centre pages--it was Carlos Ezquerra at the time on Strontium Dog--were being coloured by the artist himself. But the subtle shades that he was using meant that the colour separators, who prepare it for printing, were having to put three or four times as much work into separating each of his subtle colours as they would on a normal comic. They said that they really enjoyed it, that it was the most challenging colour work that they'd ever done, but they also said it was costing them money, they weren't making a profit out of it because they were having to put so many men on it, and they were spending so much time on it. So our colouring now has got to be kept very simple, there's not any way that we can get the artists to do it themselves. I mean, sorry Tom--

SM: Tom tries his best in the--

AG: There's a technique to colouring things the way that we've got to do it, and it isn't the best of techniques, and nobody'll deny that. I mean he's sitting over there colouring it, but he can't colour it the way he wants to do it, he knows that he's got to use certain pure colours, because of the separations.

SM: Battle has better paper than us, you will notice on the colour pages it's better. I asked why we couldn't have better paper on our colour pages, and I was told that we get all Reed's paper. Reed is our parent company, Reed International. IPC has a contract with them to buy all their bad paper. That comes to us, which is crazy but...

AG: That's just the way it is. As far as IPC are concerned, 2000AD is just another comic. It's no more special nor less special than any others. In their opinion it doesn't require any special treatment, and we believe the exact opposite, we believe that we have got the potential to become the best British comic that there ever has been, and at the moment we can't really realise it, although we don't do badly.

AP: Do you think you ever will?

AG: I think that sooner or later it will be. As I said earlier, I don't think that IPC or any other publisher can continue with a new comic/merge policy, that's got to come to an end. I don't know what's going to replace it--hopefully it will be what we want. We'll have a circulation of a hundred thousand for 2000AD, it'll be printed on top quality paper, everything will be done properly, and it will cost a fair bit more money, maybe 20 pence. That is what eventually will happen to it.

AP: You hope.

SM: Tharg thinks.

AP: Is the character of Tharg really necessary? This isn't my question, it's my editor's question.

AG: Is it necessary? Well we all dig it, we think that it gives the comic a focus.

SM: It's not a question of being necessary.

AG: It's fun, it's a good laugh, most of the readers like it.

SM: He's sitting right over there!

AP: How does an aspiring author or artist sell his work to Tharg, or to you rather?

AG: Well, he either sends it in or he comes up and shows it to us. If it's not good enough for us to use but it shows promise, we'll give anybody all the encouragement that we possibly can. It's not a lie to say that we have a constant troop of people coming up here with folios of artwork, and ideas for stories. Unfortunately, most of them aren't going to make the grade. Working as a professional in comics is a very, very difficult task, and it takes quite a long apprenticeship. Somebody like Steve Dillon has got an unusual talent, and he's very lucky in that he's been able to make money out of it while he's so young. He's one in a million, there are very very few people who can ever duplicate that. Both John Wagner and Pat Mills had three years experience in journalism before they started with IPC, they've had ten years since then. They've been in the business for a dozen, thirteen years--they should be at the top of their particular tree.

SM: What you've got to remember is that there are just, on the editorial side, two of us. In the old days a comic had about four editorial, and it's bloody difficult to find the time to read new authors' scripts, let alone write to them, and I'd like to take this opportunity to apologise to all those people out there who I have not written back to, Alan is far better at this than I am. But one day...no, I'm gonna do it soon. I have to make a choice, if I sit down and take a day and write back to everyone, the paper doesn't go to the printer.

AG: Everything in here has got to be done by us, we have got no help from anybody at all, and when we get twenty scripts from budding authors in a week, who now is going to sit down and answer them? I mean, none of us have got time to do it during the day, we don't get paid if we do it in our own time.

AP: Isn't there an actual IPC policy on it?

AG: Well, there's an IPC Script Unit, but in fact it is quite new, and unfortunately the guy who is in charge of the Script Unit -- Kelvin Gosnell, who used to be Editor of 2000, Starlord and Tornado--he doesn't have eight hours a day to devote to what his job's supposed to be, because any time that they need anything special put out, they go to him. Like the Black Hole Special--I don't know if you've seen that in the shops, that's an IPC production --anyway, they had a magazine, they knew that they were going to sell 50,000 copies of it, they had to have somebody to put it together. They asked us to do it, but when are we going to do it? There's the weekly comic, plus the Annuals, plus the Specials, plus the Judge Dredd album--it's s lot of pages. But anyway, Kelvin doesn't get the chance to do his job properly, because, as I said, when they need somebody to do something like the Black Hole Special, or the Starlord Annual --nobody down here had time to turn out the Starlord Annual -- so he gets a thing to say "Will you do it". If he says "Yes" that's it, forget your Script Unit duties and just get to work on this full time.

AP: What do you spend most of your time doing?

SM: Running around like a blue-arsed fly. I don't know, every day is so different, but I basically spend my time holding it together, I think. But lately, thanks to Alan, who's so bloody efficient, I've had a bit of time to sit down with him and together we've been able to stand back from the comic---

AG: I think that's actually why 2000's looking better now than it has done for a while, because we've put quite a lot of thought into the new stories, and a lot of work into them as well, and--

SM: Yes, we've got some good stuff coming up, I think. It had a very shaky period when I took over -- round about prog 119, because on my second day I was called down to the big chief's office and told to make it sixty percent science fiction, forty percent adventure--

AG: Which was IPC's way of preparing us for a merge with Tornado without actually telling us that we were going to be merged

with Tornado.
SM: So that screwed me up for a start, and it's only recently, I mean I've only been editor for what -- a year, and only now are we beginning to be able--
AG: To pull it all together and get the sort of things into it that we want. One of the problems about merging with Tornado is that when two comics merge, you've got to take a certain number of stories from one of them into the other, to give it some sort of reader identification with the readers you're hoping to keep. We kept Blackhawk, we turned it into a sort of space story, and we kept Wolfie Smith and sort of upmarketed it a wee bit. But it meant that we were stuck with both these stories as they were for quite a long period, and I think that from about prog 127--from the merger onwards, it looked a pretty shaky comic. There was one John Wagner story, the Judge Dredd, one Pat Mills, the ABC Warriors; Disaster 1990 was in fact a bloody disaster 1979, from beginning to end it was a disaster, it just didn't come off. It could have. We had that story all planned out before it was actually done, and unfortunately the scriptwriter paid little attention to what we had asked from him and, again unfortunately, we couldn't get a proper artist for it, who could turn in 5 pages every week, and we ended up with a competent artist who when compared with 2000's other artists just did not stand up.
AP: Is physical lack of material a problem -- lack of good material?
AG: Lack of great material. We've got plenty of fair enough material. But you'll find that wherever you go, one out of every hundred may be great and the rest's not worth it. It doesn't matter what field you're in--
AP: But from now on there are going to be more good stories and good art?
SM: Yes, say we do five stories an issue, we've got about fifteen artists we can rotate. I don't think you'll find better artwork, anywhere. So I think the art side is fairly neat; the story side we're working on, and I think that'll come through in the months to come. I think we both wouldn't mind seeing it expand on the feature side without cutting down on the stories.
AP: How would you do that?
AG: Exactly. (Laughs)
SM: A thirtysix page comic.
AG: Yeah, I would agree with that; originally I didn't think it was a good idea to expand the feature side but I must say that Steve has talked me into it. And the features that we have been putting in add to the comic rather than detract from it. I think that's because we put in some pretty good stuff.
AP: Does everyone share your enthusiasm, all the writers and artists?
AG: None of our artists, I don't think, look on this as just being a job--because we don't allow them to! If anybody turns in a "standard" set of artwork, they get told about it. I don't think that we pull our punches with praises and insults as far as artists and writers are concerned. They're told when they're doing well, but by the same token they're told when they are doing badly.
SM: The only snag is that they might all slip off to the continent, where the real money is, and I wouldn't blame them. They are good enough to do that.
AG: Most of them are good enough to do that, plus they're not happy with the question of rights.
AP: Oh yes, you were saying that IPC got everything. Isn't Kevin O'Neill doing something new, different?
AG: well, Kevin O'Neill's doing a series for us, a back page colour series, "The Seven Wonders of the Galaxy", and it's something of a breakthrough in that he has sold only the first British serial rights to IPC. He hopes to be able to sell it abroad, I don't know if he'll be able to do that. He might be able to, he might not. But Kevin was forced to accept a very very low price for first British rights only, and I know that he's not happy with the amount of money that he got, but he's not got any choice, it's either take what we offer you for first rights, or sell us all rights.
AP: Is anybody else considering--?
AG: Well the amount of money that Kevin has got for it is so low, a fraction, that I couldn't see anybody else wanting to do the same thing, because it just wouldn't be worth their while unless they had already fixed up to sell it to a continental market or for second British rights to be sold somewhere else.
AP: I'm sure that if say John Wagner and Brian Bolland got together and said "We're going to do something good", I'm sure they could sell it.
AG: Well I'm sure that they could, but as far as comics are concerned you don't normally sell a one-off thing. It's not worth their while -- it's not worth John Wagner's while or Brian Bolland's while to sit down, create new characters, new settings, new action for one six page story. If they were sitting down and working out a twenty part series which they knew they were going to be able to sell elsewhere it would be alright, but they've not got any guarantee that they can do it.
SM: We'd probably end up buying it.
AP: What, full rights?
SM: No, from the continent -- if you see what I mean.
AG: Anything which any of our artists or writers did sell abroad, if it was good enough for 2000, we would make an effort to buy it to use it here as well.
AP: Do you read other comics, American comics?
AG: Yeah, yeah. We buy a load of Marvel comics and DC comics, and we look through them and...
AP: Laugh?
AG: Well it's not so much that we laugh, it's just that there's a small percentage of them which are in fact worth reading.
Tom Frame: And don't forget we had Joe Staton, didn't we, when he was over here last year.
AP: What happened then?
AG: That was just an experiment, he happened to be here and we asked him if he would like to do a story for us. He was over the moon about it--
SM: Well look at the price he got. He was amazed.
AG: Although we moan about the rights question, as far as actual money for work you do is concerned, IPC pay better than Marvel and DC.
AP: In America.
AG: Yeah, and Marvel in this country as well. John Wagner and Pat Mills don't get as much money for writing Doctor Who as they get for writing for 2000AD, although the only way Marvel could get Dave Gibbons to provide the artwork was to offer him more than he's getting from IPC. We still have a very good relationship with Dave Gibbons. We don't look upon Doctor Who Weekly as being competition for us, because as far as we're concerned it's got one good story in it, it's got sporadically good Steve Dillon artwork, it's got the occasional balloon from Steve Moore which raises a smile, but apart from that it's got absolutely nothing at all to commend it. Except for the quality of the paper it's printed on.
TF: It's alright if you like Tom Baker.
AG: Yeah.
AP: Were you in fandom?
AG: I would say that I was a comic fan when I was young in that when I was twelve years old Marvel Comics produced their first issue of Fantastic Four, first issue of Spider-Man, first issue of the Incredible Hulk, and I bought them all, and I bought every good Marvel comic for about the next ten years. I had a massive collection of them. I didn't have anything at all to do with other fans, other than my friends who were into comics as well, there was no sort of fan organisation at that time. Eventually one night I looked at my pile of comics and I looked at myself and I thought "What are you doing?" And I gave them away. They weren't of any interest to me any longer, although I can still look back on Doctor Strange versus Dormammu for instance as being some of the best artwork I've ever seen anywhere. Or I can look back on some of Neal Adams' Batman stuff as being some of the best artwork ever done.

AP: So what do you think of fandom?
AG: We have, over the last year, become more involved with fandom than either of us have ever been in our lives before. It's a good thing up to a point, but it begins to annoy me when fans stop being just fans and become fanatical about it. I mean, because it's not worthwhile. Comics are comics, comics are fun, comics, to a certain degree, are disposable trash. And anybody who takes it as seriously as some fans I've met, they've got a screw loose. They should be putting the effort into their lives that they are in fact putting into saving up bits of paper.
SM: I never came across comics fandom on Battle, or Valiant, or any of the previous things, but my attitude is that I'm a professional journalist on comics, and tomorrow I may be asked to go and work on some football thing. Say they want to produce a new football comic, and they say, "Steve, we want you to be editor and we want to make Alan editor of 2000." So my attitude is that my prime concern is to the mass readership, not the cult. And I think that a large majority of our readers are kids in Bradford, and elsewhere, who buy it because it gives them a good buzz, not because they like the artists.
AG: I don't think it could be said that we tailor any of 2000AD to make it acceptable or attractive to what you would call fandom; the fact that fandom to some extent likes 2000AD is just a bonus as far as we're concerned. If people want to write in and send us their fanzines or stripzines or whatever, great, we'll write back and tell them what we think of them and send them free bits of artwork and

say yeah, you can use your drawing of Judge Dredd. I think we're really free and really lenient as far as that sort of thing's concerned. At the same time -- I don't know if it's worth saying this--fans are obviously amateurs, and 99% of their stuff comes over as being amateur. That other one percent, though, would seem to be getting things together. Bem, I think, is an example of it--Bem's an interesting magazine to read, even though a lot of the in-fighting between fans is nothing but a bore, it's a silly bore.

SM: You see when I mentioned Battle, you laughed, but to my mind Battle was a very good comic, and so I really don't see why the fans couldn't like that. I think it was really neat; Carlos Ezquerra worked on it, and Mike western did on Darkie's Mob some of the best art, that not only compares with the art we've got here, but supercedes it, it's just brilliant. And the colouring on that was great. I still think that Darkie's Mob is the best 20-part series I've read in comics, apart from say Dredd and Robo-Hunter. It was a real beaut, and the fact that it was war didn't come into it. Those people in those pictures lived for me, in the same way that Charley's War does now in Battle, but not quite to that extent. Of course that was written by John Wagner, it's a lovely story. Why don't you guys in Reaction write in, come on, let's hear something about Darkie's Mob, it was a good story. Not the ins and outs of something else.

AP: I haven't read it.

SM: You haven't read it?

AP: I've never read other IPC comics--well, I've read some other IPC comics...

SM: Well there you are, you're restricting yourself to science fiction--aren't you?

AP: No, I'm restricting myself to 2000AD of the current IPC weeklies.

AG: (Laughs) --That's fair enough.

SM: I'm sure that they don't read Battle. Well not at the moment, I don't think too much of Battle at the moment, but in the early days it was excellent, and the fact that it was a war comic shouldn't dissuade anyone from reading it.

AG: It was a comic of its time. In the same way that Valiant was the comic of its time, and before that Lion was the comic of its time, and before that the Eagle was the comic of its time, 2000AD is today's comic.

SM: Action was very good too.

AG: Right, sorry, I forgot Action, Action was another one which was the comic of its time. We are the equivalent now of what all these comics were to their particular generations.

TF: You've decided on science fiction, then, as the comic's--

AG: Well it wasn't science fiction, Tom, it was science adventure, and it still is science adventure. There's quite a big difference. Most of our stories, if you take away the science fiction background, these stories could be set anywhere. This is the VCs waiting to invade the Geeks' decoy planet--it doesn't have to be that, that could easily be British Commandos awaiting to invade a German decoy ammunition dump. It could just as easily be Roman soldiers waiting to invade Gaul or ancient Britain or whatever. The characters are the same, the characters are always the same, it's only the setting that changes, and you can take out the science fiction background and just make these into ordinary adventure stories. I'm oversimplifying it, obviously. The thing about giving it a science fiction background is that you can do things like he's got on that colour spread over there. ((Alan indicates the centre-spread from prog 161, drawn by Mike McMahon)) There's a giant statue 500 feet high called the Jaws of Doom; mutants pay 100 credits a time to climb up to the top of it and dive off. One in a thousand of them makes it to the bottom and collects the prize, the other nine hundred and ninety nine are applauded by the spectators as they splat off the ground. We get away with that sort of thing -- not get away with it, we use that sort of thing because it's different. You could tell a story about the ancient Greeks who had the Colossus of Rhodes, and they could have done exactly the same thing with that.

AP: It sounds really tragic that artists don't get their art back. Is it...total?

AG: It's true, it's total. We lend artwork back to artists if they want exhibitions; if an artist is going to show somebody his folio and he says to us "Oh I'd really like my pages from Dan Dare", or Judge Dredd or whatever, to show in it we would give them it to use. But we don't own that artwork, IPC own it, and all artwork which is lent out from this office has got to come back because IPC own it, and if it doesn't come back IPC are likely to take some sort of legal action.

SM: Yeah, they said they'll prosecute for theft, so all you guys out there BRING IT BACK!

AP: What does IPC do with it?

AG: They store it in their art library. They haven't sold any of it yet, but after a certain amount of time they probably will sell it. They'll either auction it off or they'll destroy it.

SM: In fact they don't need it, because when they reprint, they use the negatives that the printer used to print the comic.

AG: Yeah, every page of 2000AD is on neg anyway. I mean, there's no need for them to have the artwork. But at the same time their view is, they've paid for it, and they're going to bloody have it. And I must say that I agree with them, and the artists know these conditions before they work for IPC. I'm not saying that they shouldn't work to change these conditions, but they know before they put their pencil to paper that that's what's going to happen. And nobody at all, no artist and no writer, has got any comeback on it. Not one of them has got the right to turn round and slag off IPC for it. Because they knew what they were getting into before they got into it. The unfortunate thing is that there is no competitor to 2000AD or IPC who would buy the same stuff from them. They either work for us or they don't work.

AP: What about some Mike McMahon pages I've seen for sale--and Garry Leach pages?

AG: You might have seen them for sale--if you did, it was being done illegally, because they were stolen from 2000AD, and I would like to put in a personal thing here that if I ever come across anybody, and I don't care who it is, who has stolen artwork from this office, I'll give them a sharp crack in the mouth. And you tell your readers that; if any of them have got it, keep it out of my way.

SM: When did you see that? There was a time when it was being given out on the assumption that it was okay to give it out.

AP: I think it was a Mike McMahon Judge Dredd page, about a year ago. It was a Tweak page.

SM: Well round about prog 60, a lot of the artwork was going back to the artists.

AG: No one here has the right or the ability to give it back to the artist, it's IPC stuff. We've got a thing about theft, we have had people walking into this office, they steal our file copies of 2000AD, it has been known for pages of artwork to go missing--

SM: Yeah, who's got the Mars Force centre spreads. We want them back.

AG: Yes, who's got them? When Tornado was running, a new story was planned for it called Mars Force. Belardinelli drew three instalments, six pages each I think, for this thing, which was obviously a science fiction story...well, parts one and three of Mars Force have gone missing. They've disappeared. IPC have paid almost £1000 for that, somebody's walked off with it. And that somebody, if we ever find out who it is, will have to deal with the staff before they have to deal with the legal department.

AP: Presumably Belardinelli had nothing to do with this?

AG: No, Belardinelli lives in Rome.

AP: He lives in Rome?

SM: Hence the name, Massimo Belardinelli. Here's something the fans will like: on some pages of BlackHawk he's drawn himself.

AG: Spot the Belardinelli. He's got a wee thing about putting his own face into pictures. So if you look at the armrest of the Great Beast's throne on Silversun in Blackhawk, you'll find out that's Massimo's face. Or if you look at the little worms that are toppling out of the cooking pot of food you'll find out that they've got Belardinelli's face, and if

you look at the little snail that's crawling over a leaf in the background, it's got Belardinelli's face.

SM: There were some strange stories going round about him when he was doing Dan Dare, the then editorial team were convinced that he used to sneak out, grab a cat and cut it up, to get the right effect for the inside of a biog, exactly just like the inside of someone's stomach...I don't think so.

AP: I don't know how this question should be phrased... Have you ever felt bad about working for the IPC corporation?

AG: Yeah, we would much rather that 2000 AD was ours to do with as we wanted, and the set up would be a lot more fair as far as rights, royalties, and payments are concerned. But at the same time it's IPC's money which has paid for it, it's IPC's money that has paid for the expertise that have put it together, it's IPC's comic.

SM: That's the thing about it, it's a big monopoly in this country. It's DC Thomson, it's IPC, and a small Marvel thing. Other than that, apart from say Junior TV Times, where can you go and work on a comic? Except for Dez Skinn. No thanks, Dez.

AP: Have you considered alternatives?

AG: What, alternatives to the present set up of 2000AD? Yeah, we've gone into the question of buying 2000AD from IPC -- we can't afford it. We've gone into the question of perhaps printing a science fiction comic on our own--we can't afford it.

AP: It's a question of money, capital?

AG: Yeah, and although the writers and artists might bleat or complain about rights, they're getting paid a high initial rate in the first place, which if they were working for anybody else they wouldn't get at all.

SM: I'd like to say to all these people who keep offering Alan large sums of money to go and work elsewhere, stop it. It won't do. The hottest property in comics since--

AG: well, come on.

SM: Me, I'm just an old soak!

AP: What do you feel is the greatest weakness in the comics industry today?

AG: The big weakness is that there aren't enough good people to do it. Even talking about editorial staff. Up until recently IPC has had no training scheme for editorial staff. You joined the staff of a comic, and you learned how to put a comic together or how to write a story by actually working on it. They've now got a scheme started. My first journalistic opening was with DC Thomson, and they had an actual training scheme -- they had a general fiction department where everybody started off, and you worked in there for two or three months, and they took note of what you were good at, what you were bad at, what you liked, what you didn't like, and then you were farmed out to different things. You'd maybe go onto one title for six months -- if you didn't fit in with it, if it didn't fit in with you, they tried you out on another one. And DC Thomson's scheme was very good, and I'll add here that it was that scheme which produced John Wagner, it produced Pat Mills, and to a lesser extent, up to now, it produced me.

SM: When I joined Valiant, I wasn't taught how to conceive stories, I was taught how to produce a comic, in other words the production side of it. It was only when I went to Battle that I learnt what little I know about producing stories through John and Pat, who had come from Thomson's, where they'd received a good training. There's a lot of people who owe a lot to those two for teaching them about comics.

AP: What do you think it would be like now, if they'd never come into comics?

AG: I think that comics, generally speaking, would still be back in the Fifties, where it was before John and Pat burst onto it with their ideas.

SM: The one great exception to this is Tiger, which goes on and on. I don't want to be rude, but speaking professionally I would hate to see those stories in my comic, because they're not good fiction, they're terrible fiction. How it goes on I think is that it's the middle class comic that the parents buy for little Johnny because it's been going for twenty years, and poor Johnny has no choice but to wade through Hotshot Hamish and other horrors from eighty year old writers.

AG: There's a similarity there, a parallel with the people who write in to us asking us to bring back the original Frank Hampson Dan Dare, for instance. We don't think that there's any point in doing it; Frank's artwork might have been great, but the stories were lousy, and the character of Dan Dare, seen in today's light, is nothing. It's laughable, in fact. It's got nostalgia value, but we're not here to print a comic with nostalgia value. Screw the nostalgia. 2000AD's for now, it's for tomorrow.

SM: Until tomorrow comes.

AP: Can you say something about the IPC-DC rumour; can you put paid to the rumour?

SM: That can be summed up quite easily. It was printed in Bem, and a guy wrote in for a job on it. The managing editor knew nothing about it, that IPC was supposed to have this link with DC -- the first he heard about it was when this guy wrote in for a job on the proposed DC reprint comic. The managing editor didn't know that there was to be one.

AG: We don't know anything about it apart from that either, do we.

SM: I think there was something going on, but it sounds a bit shady to me...Richard Burton...

AG: Talking about DC comics, I asked Paul Levitz, one of DC's editors, last year at the Birmingham Comicon if his company wouldn't fancy putting out a "Best of British Comics" (i.e. best of 2000AD) in America. He said in effect that DC in America are exactly the same as IPC are here; they don't experiment with anything. You show them that they're going to get a guaranteed six figure return from something, yeah, they'll jump at the chance of doing it, and unless you can guarantee them that, they're not interested in it. He said that he liked 2000AD, he thought it had good artists, good stories etc, but he said that neither DC nor Marvel would touch it with a bargepole. By the same token I should hasten to add that 2000AD wouldn't touch the majority of DC and Marvel comics with a bargepole. A Betelgeusian bargepole in fact.

AP: Can you tell me something about the contributors, how they work, what sort of life it is, you know?

AG: None of the people employed by 2000AD make a fortune out of what they do. You

can make a reasonable standard of living if you work very very hard--

AP: I don't mean the money, I mean the way they work.

AG: Where do they get their ideas from, stuff like that? They get their ideas from anything. Anything. It's the sort of job that you don't finish at half past five, and then go away home and start again at half-nine in the morning. Almost every minute of your waking hours you're on the look out for something that might be of use to 2000AD, or you're thinking about something that might resolve some sort of problem with a story in 2000AD. I can't speak for artists, but I know that if you're a scriptwriter, it's a 24 hour a day job. You dream about it as well. You are always on the lookout for a way to improve a story; you're always on the lookout for a better word, and stuff like that.

SM: A new word for kill. What is it at the moment? Vape? I saw a good one actually, in that script: "Barbecue 'em!"

AG: We'll have that. To a certain extent it's a lonely life; it's impossible to write a script when you've got somebody sitting chatting to you, it's bloody hard enough to do it when somebody's sitting in the same room as you. Anything that distracts you from it is a big disadvantage, and it must be the same for artists. I know that a lot of artists sit up and do their work during the night, it's very lonely, yeah. But at the same time I think that the community spirit which is evoked when somebody comes into the office with good artwork that they've been up all night doing--it repays them for what they did, definitely.

AP: How do you expect comics to develop in the next few years -- up to the year 2000 AD if you like?

AG: Well, I think that with new computer technology, markets are going to shrink, comics will be higher priced, going for a smaller circulation; I have no evidence that this is the way that things'll go, but from what I've read about computer technology it's the way that it's bound to go. Because it means that small independents will be able to sit down and program their own comic, which at the moment is impossible. Eventually, I don't know how long this is going to take, but they're already testing machines which can draw...you feed in the data for Judge Dredd, right, you feed in maybe drawings done by Brian Bolland of Judge Dredd in fifty different poses.

AP: And it's got Brian Bolland's style.

AG: That's it. And what you do is you program the picture, you say Mega-City background, night, and then you say Dredd in position number 23, firing gun out of frame, and that's it.

AP: Sounds a bit depressing, doesn't it.

AG: I don't know if it is depressing. If you think about it in that way it is depressing, but think about it in this way: Brian Bolland will be able to program a machine to do what he does. Art isn't art because it's done by a human, art's art because it's bloody good, that's all.

SM: I think that a kid in twenty years' time will toddle down to his newsagent and buy that week's prog of 2000AD, but it'll be a kind of video slug, and he'll take it home and plug it in his machine.

AP: Oh yeah, I wish we could do that just now, so that you could have the sound effects for space when you're reading the VC's, or you could have sound effects for Mega-City 1 when you're reading a Judge Dredd story. It'd be fantastic.

SM: Might even be a holo-thing.

AP: Dial it onto your television -- you almost could now.

AG: The only thing is that anything like that is going to cost you quite a bit more than twelve pence. (Laughs)

SM: Perhaps, what was that in Fahrenheit 451? They were part of the play, weren't they, they had to sit there till their bit came, and the people on the screen would turn and say "Don't you think so, Chris?" And Chris, sitting in her home, would grab her script and go "Oh yes I do." I think probably in 2050 the kids will be going "No, Judge Dredd, don't!"

AG: The thing I find frightening is the fact that 2000AD's been going for three years, and in that time we have already run a whole range of futuristic things which we won't be able to represent again because the very fact that we've already done it once makes them dated. We've got to keep looking for a fresh angle on the future, and although say a Judge Dredd story's set in the year 2101, I reckon that the environment is going to be Mega-City 1-ish long before that. That's the way the world will be in another twenty years' time, not in another hundred and twenty years' time. The future is hurtling at us a lot faster than we can come up with new ideas for putting in the comic.

AP: Great, thank you.

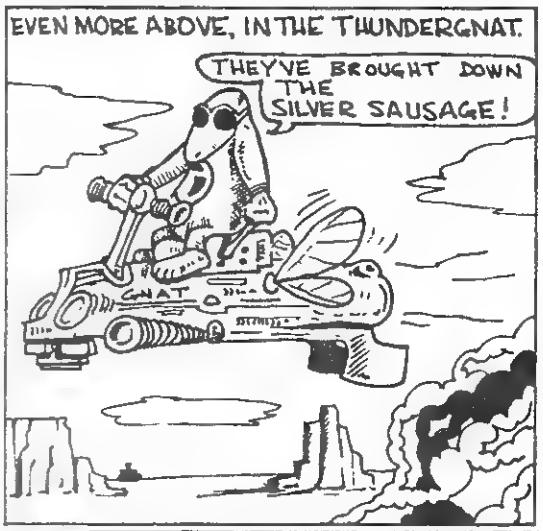
AG: You're welcome. Splundig vur Thrigg.

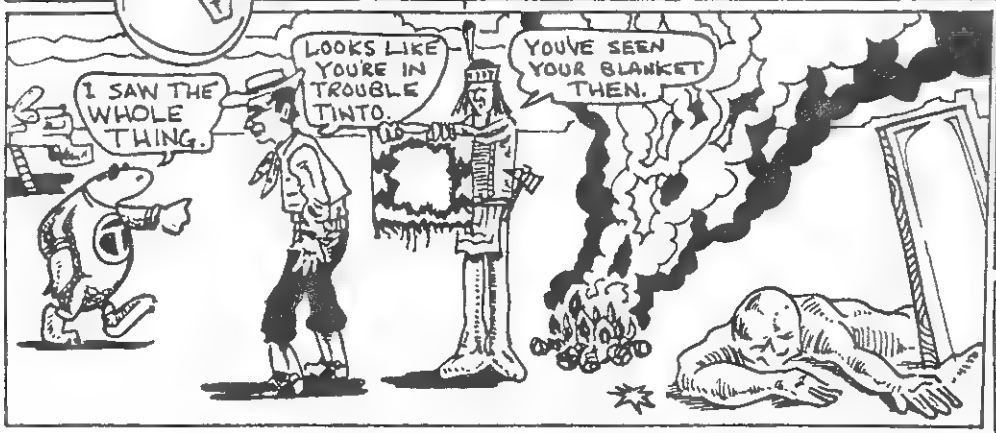
SM: Splundig vur Thrigg.

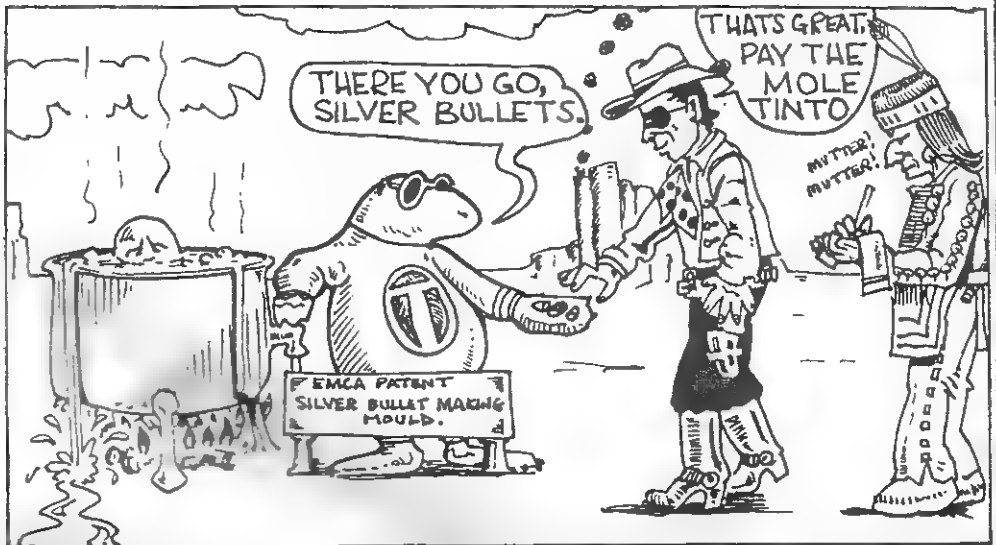
Thundermole

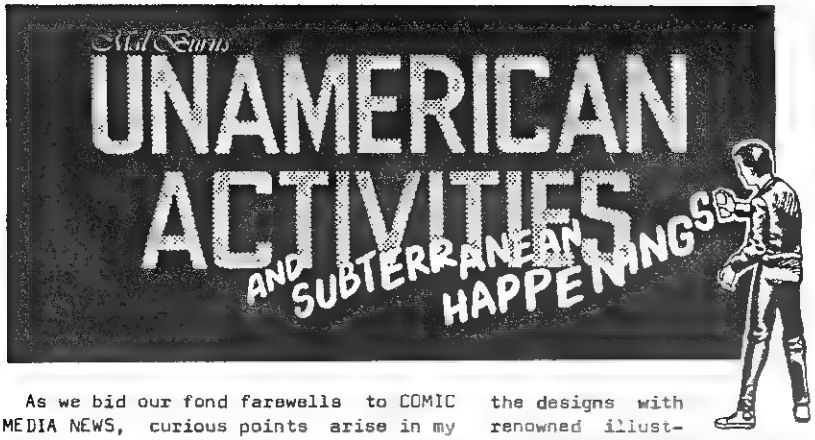
"ENDS WHERE ALL THE OTHERS START."

TERRY MOORE









As we bid our fond farewells to COMIC MEDIA NEWS, curious points arise in my mind after reading the final issue. These largely come from Eric MacKenzie's cynical interpretation of real-life events through his "Dan Dire" strip, and Mike Gold's observations on the state of UK comics.

What, I ask first, is this great hoax being perpetrated about 2000AD being the grandeur and glory of the United Kingdom? It's not a bad magazine by any means--but it certainly isn't the epitome of what our home-grown market can produce.

For the record, it can be said that the title was created by two enterprising writer/editors known as Pat Mills & Kelvin Gosnell. The prototype formula developed whilst both were maintaining full-time editorial roles at IPC. The higher management were more or less handed the idea on a plate!

The obvious original purpose was to give the kids a dose of the renewed interest in science fiction. Any thoughts about the illustrated "Dangerous Visions" were swiftly tamed in favour of using the concept as a weak disguise for the already established IPC formula--a neat group of serials that would appeal to common juvenile tastes by way of an adventure story, a sports story, a police story, and the like. Even the western story found its way into the supposed future scenario. All in all, it was a standard commercial trick, and exceptional in no way.

Dan Dare was not part of the proposed content. Although not John Sanders, it was IPC underlings who suggested that the hero's inclusion would help sales. They used an already existing property which they considered to fit on a superficial level. Only later did it occur to anyone that they might have destroyed a legend! Fans have never really reacted against the strip, which throughout fell into the clichéd style and American influence of so many 2000AD strips -- he may have been Britain's first sci-fi hero, but he ain't British no moer.

Meanwhile, another branch of the IPC conglomerate had licensed the book rights to the original Dan Dare to another publisher--oddly, a very small contemporary outfit. The deal was sealed before anyone actually knew the 2000AD revival was in the works.

IPC have now admitted that they are rather embarrassed about what their company has done. They claim that they did not intend to corrupt this respected character. Although I am hardly known as a supporter of IPC methods and practice, it would appear that they are trying to make amends for the mistake. Unfortunately I cannot suggest that it is for any reason other than by way of a profitable cop-out.

"Dan Dare" will be arriving on your TV screens in the Spring, through an experimental series being produced by a company called Phenomenon Films for Thames TV. The show will mix live action with extra visual effects. Comicbook artists Brett Ewins and Brendan McCarthy are working on the designs with renowned illustrator Mick Brownfield. Keith Watson & Brian Bolland have also been asked to contribute. Frank Hampson, creator of the original Dan Dare, is a consultant on the show. All reports indicate that the designers and producers are keeping as close as possible to Hampson's original concept. Having seen advance visuals on the series, I can state that the newest version of the character is totally in accord with the style and charisma of Frank Hampson. It seems we are saved!

It is unlikely of course that Frank Hampson will ever see his copyright on Dan Dare returned. IPC are hardly going to relinquish a property that will bring them quite handsome royalties. Nonetheless, it seems that he will at least have some influence on the future direction of the character.

Will this extend to the comic strip? Reports indicate that this may be so. Dan Dare can no longer be found in 2000AD, and it has been suggested that ITV Publications will be pursuing new storylines with a strip in LOOK-IN or a new similar title. If Hampson is kept on as a technical advisor, it's possible that some creative team could continue the legend and do it justice. With the colour facilities, production standards, and reproduction quality of the ITV Publications, such a strip might even rival those in the original EAGLE.

Which brings me back to Mike Gold's remarks in COMIC MEDIA NEWS. I very much doubt that Gold has even seen a masterpiece like the EAGLE of old. He even admits unfamiliarity with the work of Frank Bellamy and others he has heard Britons mention. The reason he admires 2000AD is the enthusiasm surrounding its creators, readers, and general presentation. This enthusiasm is genuine without a doubt, but reeks of manipulation by both the fan press and the magazine's editors.

2000AD is an American comic book being produced in the UK. It varies only in accordance with the restraints on its format and publication schedule set by IPC. The kids who read it are a generation weaned on American television shows and cultural colonialism in this country in general. They have no alternative reference point, and are too young to have witnessed the true British comics of yesteryear. In those circumstances, it's no wonder they like 2000AD!

At the same time, the hardcore comic fans continue to support the magazine because they want to prove that Britain can produce equally impressive pulp garbage to the Americans. Like IPC itself, they continue to ignore our British heritage or other foreign influences. Their enthusiasm is a complacent one!

It seems a pity that this fever and the creators' inspiration cannot be directed towards more innovation. At 2000AD, all the artists, writers and editors are part of that same American comic-fan group, and this, together with obvious work security, seems to limit their imagination.

To his credit, Eric MacKenzie has delivered the cynic's view of this situation by relating the true story of Dan Dare. It is ironic that this has been published in the fan-press alongside continued praise for the comic this abortion appeared in. How dare one criticize a situation that one actually created?

DR CYPHER -- CIPHER NUMBER TWO

This is a curious little 'zine. It unearthed itself in one of London's speciality comicbook stores, but defies the category of that medium. I have never seen a first issue, but if it looked as offbeat as this one, my missing it would be understandable.

The mag is actually called CIPHER, although this particular edition bears the title of DR CYPHER--after the character showcased in the lone comic story inside. The cover (a colour xerox dust jacket) and the strip itself are illustrated by Brendan McCarthy, one of the creators behind SOMETIME STORIES (somewhen past) and sometime 2000AD contributor. The story seems to be a weird sci-fi mystery -- totally lost on me, since the previous issue probably carried the necessary introductions. The art is also a lot more primitive than Brendan's up-market works, but polished enough by the standards of many underground comix.

The whole package is a limited edition of 200 copies --obviously a labour of love by the contributors. For 75p, one gets 32 pages and quite a few surprise items. Remove the xerox jacket and you find a white card cover --within are pages of text and illustration by four contributors plus Brendan. Every so often, you will find a pasted-in colour plate (xerox again -- but what do you expect?), and later, a wallet page containing half a dozen art (?) postcards. One of these, too, comes complete with a ½p stamp. The total concept is way beyond me--but, then again, I only bought it as a collector. It certainly qualifies as British, an alternative and visual media! Comix it ain't--save Brendan, whose cover idea provides the most attraction.

Said item is dated March 1980 and published by Jake Tilson, 44 Broomwood Road, London SW11. 95p should cover the cost, together with postage and packaging. McCarthy's strip and cover make it worth the price; the other aspects of the mag are a bonus, and, who knows, you may get more out of them than I did. Oh yes --each item is individually numbered from the 200 print run. Mine is number 99--so maybe you should move quick!

not a mistake -- for the record, he's Shel Dorf, right?) "eternal", why should I have to blue-pencil it? It's a word hardly ever used literally, after all... -ML)/

Was there anything else? Short, say-little reviews, news about new comics I can't buy, and an interesting interview with Rick Marschall. Well, better luck next time.

Colin Gould
6 Marlborough Rd
Tuebrook
Liverpool 13

The Bem Ballot was of great interest to me personally because I was keen to see how popular OGRE was, and was naturally delighted to see it do so well.

Your comic cover reproductions in the news section seemed a bit unclear. Are they rough pencil sketches, or just bad reproduction? /(The latter--some of the fine detail on those pages seems to have been lost. What with that and the pages mis-aligned for "vertical hold", I get the feeling my printers were having an off day when they put Bem-28 together; so it goes. -ML)/

The lack of Warren news mentioned by Ivo Jerry Steyn in the letter column is obviously due to Jim Warren's secretive nature regarding his future plans. I seem to recall hearing of a couple of occasions when Jim has regretted mentioning some of his plans to others. He apparently reveals very little now, which safeguards his interests but isn't very good public relations.

I was surprised that you didn't get a few more caustic comments about the Dez Skinn interview. It saddens me to see Dez slipping further and further away from his fandom roots. My thoughts immediately went back to Alan McKenzie's vigorous denial of his fandom background ("I was not active in fandom") in The Comics Journal #46.

Judging by his adverts and letters of comment in publications like THING and FANTASY ADVERTISER, anyone could be forgiven for thinking that Alan might possibly be an active fan. Someone who collects comics, reads them, and writes letters of comment to fanzines discussing the subject at some length can justifiably be termed "an active fan" in my estimation.

And, furthermore, anyone who passed a comment in "Battlefield" (FA #59) like "Alan Austin made a good point when he said that there are people involved in fandom who have no interest in comics. This alarming trend first came to my notice via The Panelologist" (my emphasis) would tend to give the impression that the correspondent (Alan McKenzie) was indeed a 'fan', and was concerned that there should be people involved in fandom who weren't really into comics. Some of the higher echelon at Marvel UK seem to think that there's shame attached to admitting that you are/were a comics fan.

Dave Wishart's comments about Neal Adams drawing from real life set me thinking that perhaps this is the correct way to go about things. After all, most of the world's greatest painters didn't exactly concoct their masterpieces from their imagination, did they? Having said that, I much prefer seeing a Kirby or Ditko original to something by Gonzalo Mayo or Boris Vallejo, who both obviously work from photographs. Can you imagine every issue of CONAN being acted out in the Marvel offices for the benefit of John Buscema's photographer?

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A new name for the "Fan Achievement Awards"? Try the "Mutual Admiration Society Awards", or the "Fandom's Great --This Is What We Like About us" awards. On the whole, I don't disapprove of this sort of thing (the Eagle Awards for instance are a fair representation of what fanzines stand for, and the thoughts of their readers), but this really does smack of narcissism. Fans are what their name suggests, admirers of one (or even several) media, or subdivisions of media. But do fans of The Police give awards to the girl who wets her knickers most over Sting? OK, maybe I'm over-simplifying it; fandom and fanzines take in a lot of talent in their respective field, but surely simply being congratulated or just having some feedback through LoCs is enough for most people? Who needs to be told that their work is that much better than anyone else's, and indeed, who has the right to decide who is "better" at writing or drawing than anyone else? It's all subjective. Martin fell foul of this himself in issue 28, implying that Brian Bolland was a "better" artist than the others mentioned in the Ballot.

The above paragraph was pretty much an extension of a growing disillusionment I've felt with fandom recently. Fans are far too reverent, too adulatory for their own good, analysing and dissecting the comics industry to an extent it really may not deserve. A hell of a lot of people regard it as a job and nothing else, and feel no responsibility towards the fans at all. However, we fans take great delight in knowing their every single movement. Fandom is extremely voyeuristic, if you attempt to take

an objective view; a case in point being the sacking of Lenny Grow, as reported in the Summer 1979 issue of The Comics Journal. About a fifth of a page described in detail the firing of someone of the very least importance to the fan interested in the creation, rather than production of comics (and even for those interested in production, a sentence, as Bem reported it, would be quite enough), and much of the report was conveyed in extremely glib terms. Granted, that is American, rather than British fandom, but isn't this the type of fandom which is 5 years ahead of us at the moment? I hope UK fandom never gets to this stage. /(Like Kamandi and Killraven, that is but one of many possible futures --as the saying goes! -ML)/

The American fascination with ducks, Barks, and Good Girls, to change tack a little, seems to be indicative of a rather different attitude to the comics business than UK fans have. The report on Lenny Grow suggests the taken-for-granted quality which American comics have for Americans. They suffer from a glut of comics, and these are not exclusive reading; everyone, or at least the bulk of the population, reads or has read a superhero adventure sometime. The UK situation is very different; US comics are fairly difficult to obtain, and have some kind of stigma attached to them. People who watch Crossroads regularly look down with scorn on someone reading X-MEN or HOWARD THE DUCK on a bus. Perhaps the UK reader feels some excitement, the feeling of belonging to a select group which the American fan is never made to feel because of the general acceptance of comics over there. While the UK reader gets his kicks out of discovering and just being able to read US material, the US fan is forced to delve into trivia in order to get something a little different from comics. Thus, the fascination with Good Girl Art etc. If this were the case, then UK and US fandoms would never become alike, because the UK fans and US fans are searching for different types of satisfaction from their comics.

Don't get me wrong; I still enjoy being considered a fan, and feeling one, but I just question some of the objectives of fandom, that's all. The "Fan Achievement" awards do seem unnecessary & egotistic, though; and if you ask me, US fans have an irritating attitude in that they take UK fandom to be inferior, rather than perhaps just different. (OK, sociologists, play with that one!)

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Kathleen is really to be congratulated on the Catwoman article --it was excellent reading, and very informative for those of us who arrived late on the DC scene. I wish I could write a well-structured piece like that!

But oh dear, here I am taking arms against Chris Ash again. I mean, I've already given my opinions of Epic Illustrated elsewhere, but it struck me as very high-handed, the way he confidently stated that Wendy Pini is "a good example of someone who would never have made it into mainstream Marvel..." Why is it, because somebody draws in a different style to the formulated claptrap of Marvel, that Chris thinks that they haven't the talent to break

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So, comic fandom's crapped out in the 1980 comicon stakes, huh? Well, if that isn't a damning indictment of the atrocious state comicdom is in at the moment, I sure as hell don't know what is. One lousy convention a year and we still manage to screw even that up; Christ, let's call in the undertakers now and save them the bother of waiting for the corpse to get on the slab.

In less enlightened days, I used to regard comics fandom as the high point of informality, as opposed to the more socially-orientated sf fandom. Each to his own, and I used to--still do, even now--regard myself as a member of both. Sf was the more clique-ridden of the two, I used to recite from my mental catalogue of clichés, and the harder fandom to become accepted in; my god, I even fell back on that hackneyed argument in the latest MAGUS. What a load of balls, and to make it worse, I actually fell for it myself.

If anything, comics fandom is more clique-ish than sf ever was, and it's getting worse every year. I mean, who really cares if fan A is a latent gay, or if fan B is really fan C using a pseudonym, or...? Okay, maybe once in a while it offers an insight into the writer's work, but more often than not it leads to a long and tedious discourse in lettercol after lettercol, not unlike the "Oh, yes it is!", "Oh, no it isn't!" monotony of a recent (and seemingly endless) discussion into the virtues--if any--of a well-known Neal Adams comic strip. It'd be a lot simpler to escort the two correspondents in question to a deserted field at dawn, and let them settle the dispute in a more traditional fashion.

The convention system just about sums up my contempt for the way in which fans are letting themselves be manipulated, herded like lemmings into the chasm--and loving every bloody minute of it. Look at the fiasco last year: the first con I've ever been to where you had to take out a mortgage to buy a bowl of cornflakes. No con booklet. No nearby shops for the little luxuries of life, like food. The neatest rip-off bar I've seen since the Holiday Inn hosted Novacon. And why, dare I ask of the great Surrey god himself, hold a con at the most expensive and inaccessible hotel in the whole of the Midlands? For the fans' benefit? For the hotel's? Or, is it simply prestige, the chance to say "Yeah, I was the first to hold a comicon at a five-star doss house"...? Whatever the answer, I don't want to hear it--I'd prefer to give Colin the benefit of the doubt and put it down to a misguided sense of innovation. But, if it happens again...

What really irritates me is the way the fans rely on people to organise the cons for them, to slap together some form of programme, to import the guest of honour (and why an American?)--the blind leading the blind. If an sf convention committee (note the numbers involved -- no way are sf cons ever a one-man show) was to announce six months before the con was due to be held that they still hadn't found a venue, they'd be lynched. Most sf cons are planned two years ahead, and announced & backed in the bidding sessions at least a year in advance. They have to be, if there is to be any hope of a coherent con. Now consider this: when I bumped into Colin at Albacon, in the first week of April, the con was still on--with no venue. Your synopsis of the con situation and events of the last few months in Bem implies that he dropped out to give Titan an open field, then found himself with too little time to organise one when they folded their plans. In other words: there's only enough room for one comic con a year in this country. Bull: fandom's an elastic market, it expands to meet demand, and demand will grow whenever you let it. Look at sf: there's virtually an sf con every month nowadays, and I've yet to hear of a con folding because of lack of support. Not a properly-organised con, anyhow.

So, sf fandom still scores over comics on the social aspect, but what of the informality I used to rave about? What informality? There's a stink of self-belief around at the moment, the odour of too many comic fans taking themselves seriously. I used to believe the same of sf fans, used to think they accepted the aura of "respectability" that's come their way over the last few years; I now realize I was wrong, I mistook a writing level higher than juvenility for pretentiousness.

No, the only area I can see now where comics fandom is still ahead on points is in presentation; sf fanzines have never been--and have never needed to be -- high production-value efforts. And when the expensive format appears--with the notable exception of Bem and a few other worthwhile comiczines--to be the exclusive tool of mental pygmies who totally waste the facilities at their disposal, whose idea of an editorial decision is to chop a letter so that it fits onto the page neatly, and whose main concern is not whether what they're producing is good but whether it'll sell and achieve predicted profit margins, that ain't much of a lead.

But the sheep still flock to buy the latest issues, still rush to the marts to pay whatever artificially-induced high prices the less scrupulous dealers ask, break their necks--and their bank accounts --to attend whatever asshole con someone has deigned to put on for them. As long as there are sheep, there'll always be plenty of wolves.

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Since I've come into fandom I've found that most of my illusions about Marvel have been shattered. Let me rephrase that; the "nice-friendly-people-at-the-bullpen" picture has been replaced by a "rotten-bastards-out-to-make-money-while-wearing-a-nice-friendly people-at-the-bullpen-mask". Us comics fans really are a cynical lot, you know. Now, I don't want to be naive, but there must be some good guys at Marvel. You just don't know what to believe, some fans are praising guys with the one hand, and throttling them with the other!

I admit that I now look upon most pro-comics people in a different way then I used to, Dez Skinn being an example. That thing about the 'Western Gunfighters' cover made me want to retch, and my vision of him isn't helped by his obvious attempts to try & cash in on the traditional British comics scene. Is this the way all Big Name Fans, if you'll excuse the term, go? I hope not. On the other hand though, my opinion of a few artists, writers etc has been raised considerably--Bill Mantlo for one, and Brian Bolland for another. My pessimism over comics has been brought to a halt though, the culprit being NEAR MYTHS; it's better than a pep pill any day! (Please add Bryan Talbot, Hunt Emerson et al to my shortlist of good guys.)

One can't help feeling, though, that the true heart of the comics "industry" (for want of a better word) lies in fandom itself, and the few (albeit excellent) stripzines & undergrounds which are available. There's a lot of fan talent around these days, so let's see more of it! One last word, on the "Hall of Fame" award section on the Fan Achievement ballot sheet, regarding Dez Skinn: I don't object to Dez Skinn possibly winning it for his past (as in a hell of a long time ago) contributions to fandom, but couldn't we give it to a DS clone if he wins, and not the one who used to rule the U.K. Marvel Empire? I couldn't stand the thought of him hanging it alongside "his" five Eagle Awards (of which 3 shouldn't be there, as Richard Burton pointed out.) /(Which was not the last word on the subject, I have heard--it seems Richard had overlooked a 1976 Award for MAD... -ML)/

I'm sorry to say this, but the last part of the H.M.S. Conqueror strip was a definite disappointment due to lack in scripting strength. Hard luck, but try harder next time and you'll have a truly great strip on your (and Dave Harwood's) hands. By the way (last point, I swear), nice to see the Imago in Bem. Is this going to be a regular feature? /(Not unless the strip leaves Graphic Sense; GS is the Imago's true home, after all. -ML)/

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If I should shake I hope you will forgive me. The sudden news of my subscription's demise hit me like an absence of Glenn Hoddle (words to conjure with) goals. The result: Cold turkey withdrawal; glistening beads of sweat, salty jewels, trickled down my exceedingly handsome forehead; dripped like a spring shower from my exceedingly blocked up nose onto my finger (half of which was up my exceedingly blocked up nose) and then fell like a delicate waterfall--flowering out into a daffodil umbrella--onto an exceedingly good cake. This must stop, it's ruining the taste, so enclosed are three hard-earned pound notes.

An interesting Bem; however, the news of Dick Dillin started it on a sour note.

Only two things for me to comment on, both from page 15. Kathleen Glancy questions the sanity of the Canadian government, Marvel style, for increasing the kill potential of a homicidal maniac to the Nth power. When talking about Wolvie one must remember that he was created (?) by the Canadian government to battle the Hulk--you know, tears tanks apart and has been known to survive battles with a certain thunder god. Wolverine is the sort of man I would back, even against the green goliath--had he been any less powerful he might well have been snapped in two by his opponent. (Remember what Hulkie did to the adamantium shielding of FALST?)

Secondly, Wayne Massop's Batman. It was fantastic, almost a crossbreed of Rogers and Wrightson--can he draw more like this? If so I predict big things -- unless he's reached "big things" without my knowledge already.

Oh yes--let's have more articles of the Catwoman type--one or two pages an issue would be great.

STAR TREK #4 & #5 (July & August)
"The Haunting of Thallus" by Marv Wolfman, Dave Cockrum & Klaus Janson; "The Haunting of The Enterprise" by Mike W. Barr, Cockrum & Janson.

Like an awful lot of youngsters, I originally discovered Science Fiction via the BBC's continued repeats of Star Trek. Shortly afterwards I began to collect comics, and after reading Gold Key's Star Trek atrocity I wondered just what Marvel could do with this series.

Then, after everyone had given up hope, along came Star Trek: The Motion Picture, which was mildly disappointing (because it could have been superb), but probably a lot better than many people, including myself, thought it would be (despite the worst ever film score I've ever heard). The Marvel Super Special adaptation was an average, predictable affair, reprinted in Star Trek #1 to #3, where the artwork actually looked less garish, and a lot better in its reduced form than in the Super Special.

On to Star Trek #4 & #5; the first all new Marvel tale.

With Marvel's recent output of rubbish, one could only approach these comics with trepidation. I turned the first page; a haunted house?? Gritting my teeth, I read on, and by the time I had finished #4, I realised that I hadn't enjoyed a comicbook as much as this in years. The plot was typical Star Trek stuff, and yet perforated with familiar Marvel touches. The format followed the show perfectly, and despite a slight resemblance to the episode "Catspaw", it had a lot of the series' atmosphere... plus a bit of old Marvel magic. The amalgamation of things Marvel and things Star Trek was "fascinating"--and it worked! The writing in both issues lacked the characterization one associates with Trek, but Marv Wolfman's scripting was the better of the two, if only because of Mike Barr's terrible mistake of completely disregarding Spock's "humanization" (for want of a better word) which is one of the movie's main points, although only touched on briefly in the adaptation.

Dave Cockrum and Klaus Janson have really got to grips with the artwork, and the likenesses of all the Enterprise crew were handled very well (except for Sulu and Chekov). The apparent liaison between the artists and colourist Carl Gafford also worked extremely well; the Transporter effects and spacescapes (particularly on page 11 of #4) were something I've never seen attempted in American comics before.

If Marvel can find a Star Trek enthusiast to script the series, and keep the current artistic team together, Trekkers are in for a real treat. -Gary Millidge

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THE ROOK #3 (June) £1.75
The Rook in "The Original Master of Time" by Will Richardson & Lee Elias; "Bravo for Adventure" by Alex Toth; and Voltar in "Comes the Endtime" by Will Richardson and Alfredo Alcala

This issue concludes the three-part, 73-page Rook adventure that Bill DuBay chose to start off Warren's new adventure title with--and it's the best tale yet of America's answer to Dr Who, with fine Lee Elias art, and another striking Bob Larkin cover.

The story is a sequel to H.G. Wells' "The Time Machine", which, we learn, was inspired by the exploits of Restin (Rook) Dane's grandfather; H.G. himself, who has been having a busy time lately, appears, as does Restin's grandad, plus Quarb, the immortal apeman genius from whom the whole of mankind is descended.

Like much good fiction, there is light and darkness here, but I question the need to show the naked body of the story's Eloi heroine, Chelsa, her arms and legs hacked off, roasting on a spit. And Will Richardson (alias Bill DuBay) describes the burning, bubbling, crackling...

My main criticism of the book is that the back-up strips aren't normal Warren material--with CREEPY #119 all Alex Nino reprints, and EERIE #112 all Maroto, it's in short supply this month. Toth's serial about a pre-war stunt pilot, Jesse Bravo, had been designed for book publication--and Alcala's Voltar is more familiar from "groundlevel" appearances, while a few name-changes could get it into The Savage Sword of Somebody-or-Other.

A promising title, this; but more Rook material would be nice. -C.N. Padgett

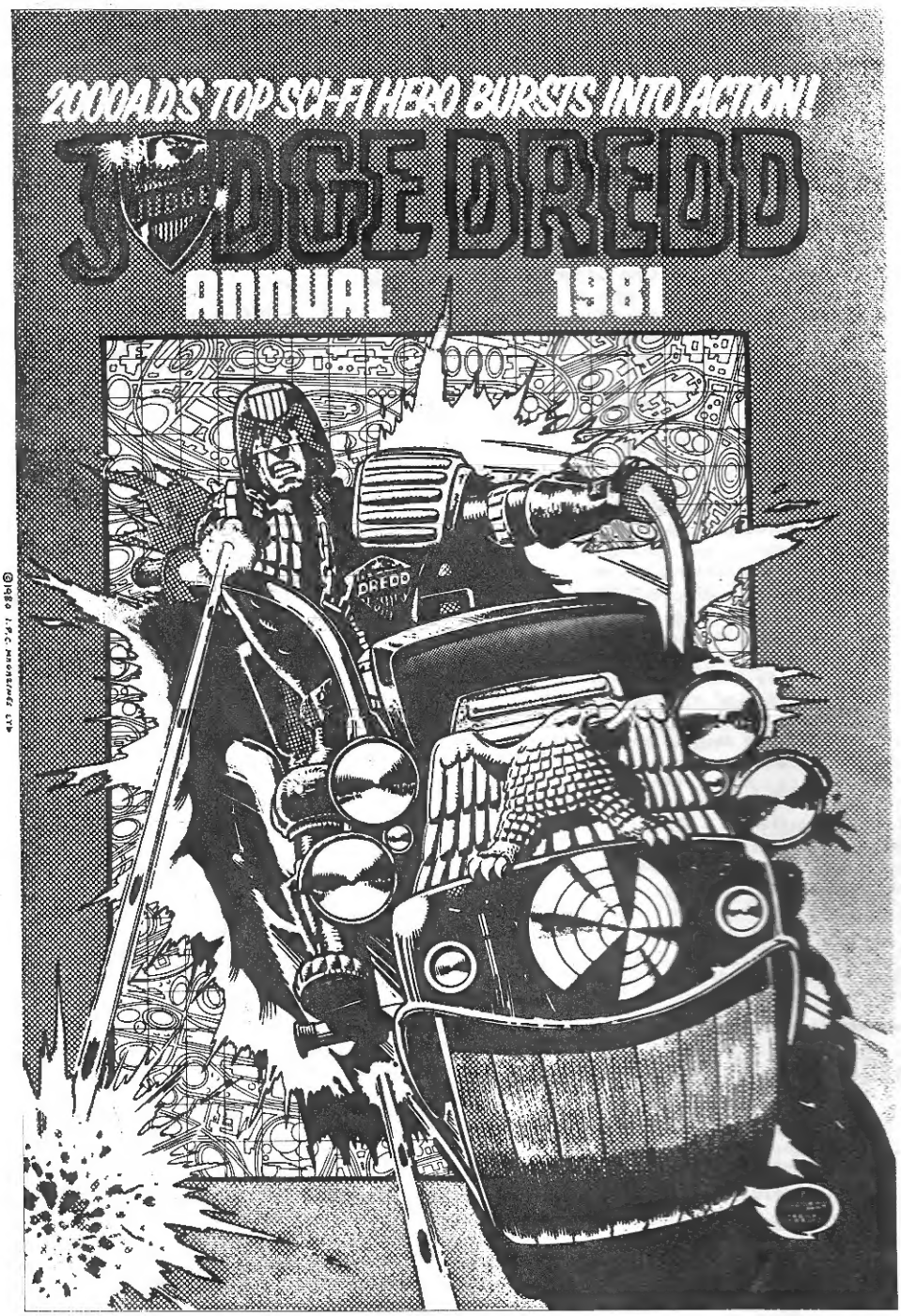
JONAH HEX #39 (August)
"The Vow of a Samurai" by Michael Fleisher & Tony DeZuniga

In recent times, Fleisher has come under heavy fire for his storytelling, but there can be no doubt that Jonah Hex remains his finest work. This issue is the most bloodthirsty for a long time. Jonah swears an oath to cut off a samurai's head and, as we all know, Jonah is a man of his word.

In fact it's all part of the ancient rite of seppuku (which is hara-kiri to most of us -- or insanity if you're like me). Fleisher goes into intricate detail while describing the ritual, just in case you'd like to try it -- all you need is somebody willing to decapitate you. Happy hunting! -John M. Parker

WHAT IF? #22 (August)
"What If Dr Doom Had Become a Hero?" by Don Glut, Fred Kida & Dave Simons

I've got nothing personal against Don Glut, but I wish he'd write an issue of this magazine that I could enjoy. Mind you, he's not alone. Doom, as a hero, is probably a difficult concept to deal with and if this is the case, then Glut can be forgiven. However, the struggle with Mephisto is not such a hot idea. Sure, it's your basic good versus evil, but there's nothing new introduced into the story. As usual, Mephisto is after souls, and it's a case of Doom's or that of his beloved wife. I won't say what choice Doom makes -- but you might be able to guess. The art is rather average, especially Doom's new costume which is totally insipid. Maybe I wouldn't be so hard on the magazine in general if it could only live up to expectations. Frankly, I am sick of hoping. -John M. Parker



ART CREDITS

Brian Bolland: 27; Laurence Bowkett: 21, 25, 39 (left); Peter S. Darkseid: 35; Dave Harwood: 2; Pete Martin: 34; Mike Matthews: 18; Mike McMahon: 1, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16; Terry M. Moore: 17, 31; Russ Nicholson: 39 (r); Phil Rushton: 23; Superswipe: 29.

The artwork on the front cover, and pages 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 29, and 39 is copyright (c) 1980 I.P.C. Magazines Ltd.

To the left is the cover of the 1981 Judge Dredd Annual, due out in August --you are reminded that it is full of brand-new strips & other interesting material, by 2000 AD's top talents, including John Wagner & Mike McMahon. Well worth £1.80--as the print run is rather low, reserve your copy now!

RABBITS TEND TO EXPLODE, according to David Haden, who will send you the second issue of his (20 A5 pages) fanzine of that name for a 12p stamp plus an s.a.e., from Shottery Post Office & Stores, Shottery, Stratford Upon Avon, Warwickshire. Maybe David sneaks out at dead of night with sticks of dynamite painted orange to resemble carrots, and scatters them in the fields? Anyway, it's a pleasant, rather lightweight personal zine, with bits on Brian Eno, "Rabbitorial", letters, and a bit on "Stars of Fandom", revealing the birth signs of various fannish notables (Nige Edwards is Pisces -- almost every Friday night, rumour has it...). It would be interesting to compare the general personality clichés of the various signs with the known traits of the fans covered --but David doesn't do this.

Mention of personalzines brings me to MAGUS #7, produced by Phil Greenaway. It has in recent times been distributed with up to one-third of BEM's subscription copies; however, Phil has pared down the list to those who actually responded to the "free gift", so only 30 copies are going out this way this time. However, if you want to purchase a copy, send two 10p stamps to the Bem editorial address. It's an interesting read, with the most...er ...intriguing con report since Guy N. Smith in his heyday? Names dropped include Bram Stokes ("a very nice guy -- he goes to all the best room parties"); names not dropped include the Scottish femme fan who wrote her phone number on Phil's back. I think Phil enjoyed Albacon...and in 12 A5 pages you'll read all about it.

THE EQUALIZER #1 costs a dollar for 36 A5 pages from Artie E. Romero, 432 South Cascade, Colorado Springs, CO 80903, USA; it contains the origin and 4 adventures of a rather Ditko-esque space hero drawn in a cartoony, underground style, plus a strange 9-page heroine story ended by a "deus ex machina" (literally). It's a refreshing approach to a Starlord/Starman type of character, if in places stilted and hard to follow.

One of the most interesting & reliable British fanzine publishers recently has been Graham Bleathman; and now he's joined forces with Graeme Bassett, which brings an extra dimension to MAGAZINE OF TOMORROW #6 (20 A5 pages for 30p from G. Bleathman, 14 Archibald Rd, Barnfield, Exeter, Devon) --GB2 supplies articles on The Invaders (the TV lot) and The Tomorrow People, and GB1 draws the latest episode of "The 2nd British Empire", scripted by Glen Dakin, and supplies a very striking cover in his own increasingly confident style. In the same envelope came ADVENTURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY (12 A5 pages for 20p), which is a 10-page Gerry Anderson-inspired strip by GB+GB, plus description & background. You'll find 50p well spent on these two magazines, I'm sure; and this sort of work certainly deserves encouragement.

Normally I avoid the negative side of the fandom business, as this column is here to encourage people to investigate more fanzines; I don't want to put anyone off sending money to any of the fanzines I review. However, one does hear, very occasionally, of what could be described as "mail order fraud"--someone sends off money for a fanzine, and gets nothing. A certain magazine took a full page in Bem #25, talking of "keeping to a five issues per year schedule"--that was a year ago, and nothing has been seen yet. I'm sure there was no intent to defraud, and many other zines appear a month or so later than they advertise -- but if you intend to produce a fanzine, be very careful of advance advertising. If you do not have your magazine ready when you receive an order, you must acknowledge receipt of the money, and indicate when it will be despatched. If after 28 days the magazine still isn't despatched, you must offer full reimbursement, enclosing an s.a.e. for a reply. Presumably similar rules apply to subscriptions, when a fanzine is late; certainly any request for the return of such monies should be actioned without delay. And I would generally advise anyone buying fanzines by mail to rely more on fanzine review columns than on nice big glossy advertisements. At least then you know the magazine actually exists as more than an over-ambitious dream!

Ironically, the only ad in this Bem my remarks could put you off, the one for METAMORPH 1, is from Lew Stringer, who has been the injured party in a couple of such cases recently. It even quotes a price "plus postage", always suspicious (are we supposed to be mind-readers? How are we to know the thing's weight? Over 60 and under 100 grams I'd say in this case, so add 13½p to the 30p quoted). On this occasion, though, I can vouch for the editor, so feel free to send your 43½ pence to Lew. I see him occasionally, so if the fanzine isn't out in October I'll break his kneecaps for you!

If you don't get what you've paid for, or even a reply to a reasonable query to any fanzine -- let Bem know.

CONDUCTED BY P. THOMAS AND N. HUGHES:

JOHN WAGNER REVEALS ALL

Q: Why do you use pseudonyms?
JW: Just for fun. The tendency to treat comics seriously must be resisted at all costs.
Q: How did you choose them?
JW: John Howard got stuck on me--I'm not sure how. He appeared one day on a Dredd story, and I've kept him on Dredd ever since. I daren't let him loose on anything else, because of his extreme views. Grover took his name from one of the great unsung heroes of our time -- T.B. Grover, the master card-player & all-round good sport. To see him play is a lesson in excellence --and usually an expensive one! He's known as "the man with the magic mitts".
Q: How long have you been working for IPC and 2000AD?
JW: For IPC, off and on for about ten years; for 2000AD, since its inception.
Q: When did you start scripting Judge Dredd?
JW: Dredd was my idea. I did the first script--which was never printed--and then didn't write another until the first of the robot war stories. A fairly accurate account of Judge Dredd's origins is being printed in this year's Dredd annual. This is going to be a cut above your general run of annuals, having something like double the normal budget, and it contains about 30 pages of original Howard and McMahon work in colour, as well as some good back-up material. Place your order now!

Q: You've done over a hundred Dredds. Do you want to continue with this strip?
JW: Frankly, no. Fresh ideas and fresh enthusiasm are pretty hard to come by. I haven't made any final decision --but my feeling at this moment is that the present "Judge Child" series will be my last.
Q: That's certainly a pity. Why do you think Dredd is so popular?
JW: For many reasons. Largely because he is extreme. Wishy-washy characters do not go down well, but someone who is extremely bad or good is automatically more interesting. Dredd scores twice here, because he is both good and bad: the stern upholder of the law, never wavering from his code--and yet making judgements that are, by today's standards, terrifying. Another important point is that Dredd is real--a credible character in a credible situation. Caped creeps mincing about in leotards are all right, I suppose, if you happen to be mentally defective. Personally, I'd rather stick my head in the oven.
Q: Would you like to see Judge Dredd in his own comic?
JW: People who should know tell me it would be a great success--but I'm firmly against it. I'd much rather see a strong Dredd in a strong 2000AD.
Q: Which was your all-time favourite Judge Dredd story?
JW: I don't know, but my favourite colour is green.
Q: Um, right... How long have you been reading comics?
JW: I've never been much of a comic reader--too many of them are trash. That's not to say there's anything wrong with the medium, just that it has been grossly misused. Of the comics I have enjoyed, "BUNTY" in the late '60s ranks as the best. Their stories were well-told, inventive and witty. D. C. Thomson's boys' comics were also quite good at this time, but they didn't quite match up to BUNTY.
Q: BUNTY?
JW: Uh-uhh.
Q: Your styles on Robohunter, Dredd and Strontium Dog are so different. Do you set out to do this deliberately?
JW: Partly it's the type of story that causes this, but it's fair to say that Grover is a much more whimsical person than Howard, who is a bit of a grump. Neighbours tell me he's a secret collector of Nazi insignia.
Q: Where did you get the idea for the Strontium Dog and Wulf?
JW: That's like that question "When did you stop beating your wife" --an idea comes from so many sources it's generally impossible to identify them. If you can glibly identify the source of an idea, you have probably ripped it off. In the case of Johnny Alpha, I started with the idea of a future bounty hunter and developed from there.
Q: Will you be bringing the Strontium Dog back?
JW: That's a distinct possibility.
Q: Did you expect Robohunter to be as popular as it has been?
JW: I hadn't been aware that it was all that popular. Certainly not in the sense that Dredd is. It was a good middle-of-the-road story that got a good reaction, mainly from the older readers. It was a lot of fun to write, though, and some of Ian Gibson's artwork was superb.
Q: Do you feel continuity is important in 2000 stories?
JW: Up to a point. Obviously within one particular story it's necessary to be consistent, but if you try to carry this through to every story you're in danger of disappearing up your own arsehole. Dredd's world can't be Sam Slade's world --it's far too limiting for poor old Sam. Those who make a religion of continuity usually end up constipated.
Q: Would you like to see team-ups between characters--e.g. Alpha and Dan Dare?
JW: Perish the thought! It's an admission of defeat. Characters aren't doing well individually, so you lump them together and hope this concoction of mediocrity will somehow miraculously turn into something good. What you get is a double dose of mediocrity. Surely it's better to think up new characters -- or is that too hard for some publishing firms?
Q: Why do you think TORNADO and STARLORD failed?
JW: TORNADO failed because it was a load of crap. STARLORD failed partly because they didn't charge enough for it. A higher price wouldn't have lost all that many readers, and would have allowed them to improve standards all round--more colour, better stories, et ceteras. It could have been really good. But that answer is too simplistic. There's a deep malaise in the business, and no one factor governs the success or failure of a comic.
Q: What do you think of Marvel Britain's recent changes and expansion?
JW: I don't think much of Marvel, period. They're a constipated company who've been living too long on past successes -- well past. As far as I know, the expansion is over. Pat Mills and I scripted the lead story in the Doctor Who comic until recently, when we were asked to take a fifty per cent cut in rates because of Marvel's financial problems (not caused by our script rates, that's for sure!). At the same time we learned Marvel's next launch will be all reprint--more crap. So I think you can take it they're in trouble.
Q: How do you feel about the current state (falling sales) of comics, American and British?
JW: Obviously the economic situation has a large bearing on this. But I think the years of poor-quality material must take a share of the blame. Comics find it difficult enough to compete against television, bad ones find it almost impossible. Now we have a situation where there are too many comics, most of them holding on by the skin of their teeth, and budgets being trimmed to the minimum. This in turn leads to poorer material, and even less credibility for comics. It's getting to the point where, if a quality comic comes out, there won't be enough readers left to appreciate it. What's the answer? I don't know. I'm looking for work elsewhere.
Q: You have plans to move away from comic scripting altogether?
JW: Plenty of plans, not much action.

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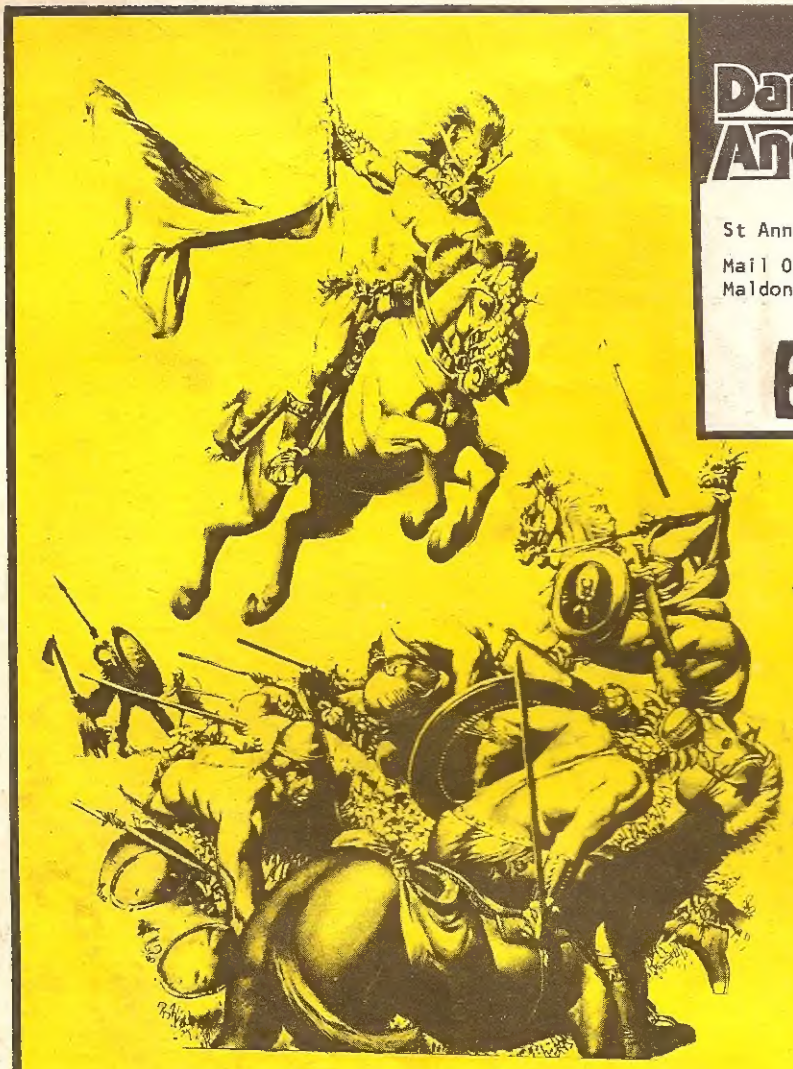

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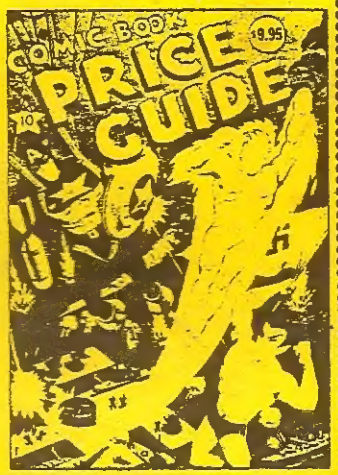

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